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# THE WORLD'S MERCY

BY

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THE SILENCE OF DEAN MAITLAND, THE HOUSE
OF HIDDEN TREASURE, SWEETHEARTS AND
FRIENDS, IN THE HEART OF THE STORM,
A COSTLY FREAK, ETC.

Mary G. Tuttle.

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# THE WORLD'S MERCY

## CHAPTER I

### IN THE STREET

A BITTER wind swept the dim-lighted street, along which a few stragglers passed with bent heads and swift steps, and through which wheels rattled drily at intervals. It shook windows in sudden gusts; it rose from time to time to howl savagely round the house, and died down in groans and mutterings of impotent rage. Stars glittered with fiery brilliance in a steel-blue sky that seemed to shudder in the fierce blast; trees shivered and moaned in the bear garden.

When a wild shriek down the chimney drove smoke and ashes from the grate into the room, Isabel rose and read a thermometer upon the wall near the cot where her little son slept a troubled, feverish sleep, inter-

rupted by a faint moan that was almost a cough, and accompanied by thick breathing, which her quick ear recognised as growing less and less difficult. From the thermometer her gaze turned to the sleeping child, the anxiety that furrowed her brow softening in a tenderness that took years from her apparent age.

It was a year-old boy, a noble babe, with plump limbs, broad chest, and chubby cheeks, the delicate carmine usual to which was now a burning crimson. She knew that this fine development and strength made the baby all the more susceptible to acute lung trouble; she could have cursed the black northeaster that was suffocating her last and only child. Drawing the coverlet warmly round the dimpled chin, and denying herself the kiss she was about to take, she stepped softly back to her seat by the fire, resuming the book that she read less than the boy's sleeping face as she faced the cot, her elbows on the table, her head in her hands, the light of a shaded lamp on the page.

He was so much better, out of danger, her husband had told her that morning; with warmth and food he would be well soon. Tears suddenly scalded her eyes at the thought of his narrow escape: what if he had not taken that better turn? She had lost all the others, three beautiful children, two boys and a girl; she could not lose Harry, the last, the only hope of her life. Her face darkened, a vindictive look crossed it at the remembrance of those lost innocents—murdered innocents, she called them.

She drew out her watch—so late?—and replaced it with a heavy sigh. But Harry was better, better, better. It rang in her head in happy rhythm with her heart beats; she was thankful, she would forget the past, she would live her difficult life more bravely, more sweetly; she could forgive so much to-night. That had been her portrait on the wall, only eight years ago—that smiling, child-eyed girl, with parted red lips and wondering gaze. Harry had just that gaze sometimes. She smiled bitterly at a com-

parison of that pictured face with that she saw daily in her glass; a handsome face still, but marked with passion and pain, scorn and suffering, a wild scorn of her own suffering and the baseness of others, an angry wonder at the iniquity of man and the injustice and misery of life; a face whence trust and hope had fled, where ignorance was replaced by bitterest knowledge, innocent wonder by dark experience.

Her husband's portrait balanced hers on the wall; both were painted photographs, taken just before their marriage. His was a genial, frank face, with full lips, broad brow, and clear, well-opened eyes; she had seen, and could now see, nothing sinister in it, no faintest suggestion of evil. Strange it was to look on that young bride and bridegroom and wonder about them now, as one might wonder at some ancestral story or historic incident, remote, yet faintly linked with one's own story. Had she in very truth been that poor, happy young creature, pathetic in her blank ignorance of life's agony, and had he

verily been that gallant, gay young man with the bold, frank gaze softened to a lover's tenderness, and a mouth smiling with expectant joy? "*Si jeunesse savait!*"

The wind brought a whirl of wedding bells now and again upon its eddying blast. She heard them with a sardonic smile, wondering what transformation awaited the young couple for whom they rang. She knew the bridegroom, and in a few days would call on the unknown bride brought home to-night. She liked the man; he seemed all that a wife could wish—good-hearted, kind, steady, manly, deeply, if silently, in love. The bride's photograph had been shown her once in a moment of expansion, with bashful pride. She had said all that is expected on such occasions, yet he had been chilled, replying nothing, but looking first with sad wonder at her saddened face, then with grave musing on the carpet at her feet. What will he do to her? Isabel wondered, as she recalled the incident.

Many things long forgotten came into

her mind to-night. She was worn with a series of broken nights and some of complete watching; her heavy eyes kept closing in spite of herself, and in the drowsiness old things returned. Her engagement, her pride in George, her girlish worship of him; if ever husband had been reverenced, he had. That curious, far-off happiness, combined of fulfilment and expectancy; the rapturous heart-throb of the home-coming—to this very house! newly furnished and decorated then; her strange pride in her pleasant home and her new matronly dignity, her absorption in George and delight in ministering to his comfort and happiness. How singular and remote these things appeared now! What is personal identity, after all? She knew how that Isabel Arnott had thought and felt, and acted in those days, but thought of it with wonder and without sympathy, half contemptuously, half wistfully. Her mother's first visit had been the pearl of all that joy. How glad her mother had been to see and share her daughter's happiness!

She had died a year later. Isabel found herself thanking Heaven that her mother was dead, and tears sprang to her eyes. She had had no tears at the time of her mother's death, only an iron pain and a choking spasm in the throat.

A faint sound broke upon those mournful recollections; the door opened softly, a rosy face peeped in, and, on receiving a sign from the wet eyes, was followed by the figure of a buxom maid, who glided noiselessly, in stocking feet, to the cot, and thence, after a long gaze, to the watching mistress.

"He *do* breathe better, ma'am," she whispered; "don't he, the darling?"

The mother smiled an assent and looked an interrogation.

"The man, Barton," whispered the maid, "he wants to know if it's any good waiting any longer for the doctor? It's gone eleven and his wife wanting to be sat up with."

Isabel's face darkened. "I don't know," she whispered back. "I told him I could not say how long the doctor might be kept.

He must do what he thinks proper. You can say you are going to bed, Charlotte. You had better lock the house up and go to bed. I want nothing more for Master Harry. Are the others gone?"

"Shan't I take Master Harry to-night?" the girl asked.

"No, no. He must be kept in one temperature."

"I could make a good fire, and we could cover his face and carry him, cot and all, into the nursery or the spare room," she added, earnestly.

"No, no," the mother replied, with agitation, "I don't dare. All the rooms are north, too. No, best here."

"Oh, ma'am! hadn't you better? I'd lock the door."

"Hush! No. You mean well, Charlotte, but you don't understand."

The girl went reluctantly, the boy waked with a stifling cough; Isabel lifted him and held him covered warmly till the cough brought relief; then she walked up and

down the room with him, crooning some lullaby, till the moaning ceased and he slept again.

When he was back in his cot she went downstairs and round the silent house, seeing that all was safe and properly locked. Then she mended the fire in the dining room, building it up to last through the night, with the skill of experience. The room was cosily curtained and brightly lighted; it had been handsomely fitted once, but was now shabby, the leather-covered chairs were stained and ripped, here and there a stout oaken back was broken. Isabel saw her tired, haggard face, all broken and distorted, in a mirror that had been splintered by a blow; it was at once an emblem and an epitome of her shattered life and hope. There were stains on the table cover, stains on the wall paper; the latter, of a dull dark brown, were blood stains. Once she had tried to take them out, but now regarded them as a fitting part of the whole. Yet the grotesquely distorted reflections of

the shattered mirror and the sinister stains on the wall always filled her with fresh horror when they met her gaze.

She wheeled a comfortable easy-chair to the fire, placed slippers before it in the blaze, took a spirit stand from the cellaret and stood it on the table within easy reach of the chair, with a hot-water jug, soda water, a jar of tobacco, matches, an ash tray, and glasses which did not match. The brass kettle in the fender bore marks of ill-usage. So did many things in that woful room, the stolid witness of a long-drawn domestic tragedy in many scenes and acts.

Having done all and returned to the child, she undressed, pausing first to consider if she dared remain up and dressed; but a reflection upon past experience told her that her best chance was to obey orders, while the restful warmth and recumbence of bed were but too inviting to wearied limbs and overstrained, outwatched nerves. The boy stirred with a faint moan; she took him gently in her arms and lay down with him.

"God help us!" she murmured, as she slipped under the eider down with her sacred treasure on her breast. But she did not pray; she had forgotten how long it was since she had discontinued that custom.

Silence soon reigned throughout the house; the storm raged on outside, shaking windows, shrieking through keyholes and corridors, buffeting chimney stacks and roaring in trees. All slept: the tired healthy young servants, the recovering baby; most deeply of all the overwearied mother, lulled by wind without and warmth within. Holy, healing Sleep took even that scarred and tortured heart to his balmy breast and hushed it to exquisite peace. But Isabel remembered, even when the sweet confusion and relaxing of slumber dissipated her tired thoughts, how often the sanctity of that holy presence had been violated in this house of horror and pain, and something of fear and anxiety remained upon her face and troubled her dreams long after this blessed truce to life's misery had come to her. But

at last the trouble went completely out of her face, the breath that rocked the sleeping boy on her breast became softly inaudible, dreams vanished, she smiled faintly in her perfect rest and looked young again, her years numbering but twenty-eight.

The small hours came with lagging pace, clocks struck two and ticked on in the silence, the half-hour chimed, and the three-quarters; then the stillness of the sleeping house was violently broken by loud and repeated jangling of the night bell.

Charlotte opened sleepy eyes upon the pale darkness and turned, shuddering at the angry dissonance; the other servants drew the clothes over their ears and tried to shut out sounds not unfamiliar to them at night—sounds that followed on unbarring the door and the cessation of bell clangour, sounds of overturned furniture and breaking glass, of a man's shout of hoarse rage, a woman's stifled shriek, the pitiful wail of a sick babe.

Charlotte turned again with an angry sob, murmuring that she would stand it no

longer; the cook groaned and buried her face deeper in the pillow; all shuddered at a renewal of those sinister night sounds, culminating in a terrific crash and rattle of street-door chains and bars, followed by duller sounds and silence, in which sleep once more descended softly upon the startled household.

But outside on the pavement, beneath the keen, cold brilliance of frosty stars, her one thin garment and her hair rudely tossed by the bitter blast, stood the mistress of the house, white-faced, wild-eyed, fury, horror, and hatred raging in her heart. The wind had its own way in the empty street, dimly lighted by lamps and bordered by blind, still houses, in which a dull gleam was rarely visible. The strange silence and emptiness of those rows of houses so animated by day had something of death's stony cruelty: that living beings, faces familiar, were sleeping behind those long walls of black masonry seemed incredible; that among all the sleepers and watchers she knew to be there not

one would help her in her terrible need was an indisputable fact. It was not the first time that Isabel's white, unprotected feet had pressed those cold stones at dead of night; she knew very well what to expect—the possible insult of a belated drunkard, the agonizing pity and unwelcome interference of the policeman on his beat, the grudging, humiliating hospitality of a neighbour roused from sleep.

And she was well acquainted with the pitiless face of the night sky, the cruel indifference of the home which was her own, the incredible savagery of the human beast lapped in warmth and comfort within, content in his swinish luxury after thrusting her, defenceless and unclad, into the open street at night. But not her alone. What filled her heart to bursting with fury and indignation was the helpless child's exposure to the cruel night, with no shelter from the biting wind but her arms.

She covered him as best she could, unloosing the heavy plait in which her hair was

always woven at night, lest it should be torn out by the tyrant's cruel hand, and winding the small suffering form pressed closely to her breast in it. But she could not keep the frosty air from the labouring lungs, try as she would; her eyes filled with horror and her brain with madness at the thought that it was death for the cherished boy. The habitual fear of the policeman's measured step, the habitual dread of the gaze of some passer-by or rudely awakened neighbour at a window, vanished in the agony of his danger; she forgot the unseemliness of her garb and the degradation of her position in the frenzied instinct to save the poor babe. She dared not rouse her house, lest the savage who had thrust her out should appear with fresh violence; there was no way of entrance not carefully barred; no neighbour, she had been warned, would admit her again; the police station was far and in the direction of the wind. She prayed for help, but her prayer crumbled to curses when she remembered former prayers unheard and the se-

quent death of an unborn child. She wept and her tears seemed blood, for red drops from her face had stained the poor baby's. A thousand thoughts rushed in a moment through her maddened brain. She wondered that God and man could permit this cruelty, should look on, unmoved and unaiding, as it seemed to her, while a man-swine tortured and destroyed his helpless offspring. Unwilling maniacs are shut up; the wilful, deliberate madman is allowed to ravage his home and loose his blind and brutal violence upon the helpless creatures shut up with him at his mercy.

Voices from the past sounded by her on the rushing wind; a man's voice, mellowed by the music of young love, murmured "Isabel" —the voice had never pronounced her name till that moment nine years ago, when every fibre of her nature had stirred responsive to it, and her heart had leapt with the curiously mingled rapture and agony that is the birth-pang of love. Where now was the gallant, gay young lover whose kiss had awakened

all that was deepest, sweetest, and best in her, whose glances had thrown a glamour over the visible world and filled life with the music of Paradise? Where the hand whose warm yet reverent pressure had given her such glad assurance of succour, the arm that had enfolded her in a world of secure bliss, the eyes that had looked love and honour and promise of continuous joy to hers, the face she had reverenced, the words of sweet wisdom and noble purity?

Visions of green lanes and sunny seas, scent of wild-rose and honeysuckle, snatches of song those lovers sang, went by on the wind with that low-voiced "Isabel," and many a fervid promise and passionate avowal in the same voice. And with them went the surprised joy of being loved and chosen, unworthy she, out of the whole wide world, throbbing fears and exquisite pangs of hope, the dream-like unreality of those first bridal days among the mountains, with sunsets and sunrises, scent of wild strawberries picked in woods, broad and beauteous

reaches of landscape seen and books read together in those halcyon days, and always, like the refrain of a song, that first, low-breathed "Isabel," in George's moved voice. George, who had made her home a sty, who had outraged every feeling and crushed every hope in her heart. Nothing he could say now could move her to anything but hatred and contempt. Those sweet memories were as the mockery of demons, that tender "Isabel" as an impish chuckle from hell. There is sorrow that refines and elevates, that even in breaking the heart breaks it to fine music and lets it die in sweet odours, and there is misery that degrades and crushes, searing all noble instincts and crushing all high feeling. Of such was Isabel's, she was wont to think, and now felt vaguely in the confused agony of the moment, as she cowered in her own doorway, seeking shelter from the wind, bending her shivering body over her child and cursing the author of this cruelty, who lay, as she had so often seen him, in the room above in a

drunken heavy sleep that she would fain have made eternal.

All of a sudden there was a voice in her ear and a warm, living touch on her shoulder. "Is there nothing to be done, no way into the house, can't I kick the windows in?" she heard, in a quick, thick utterance.

"No, all barred and shuttered," was the hopeless reply as she looked up into the face of a man who had rushed in noiseless slippered feet from the opposite house.

"Then in Heaven's name come into mine," he added, "before the child dies!"

In another moment the three were inside the opposite house in darkness, the door was silently shut and locked, and a match struck and held to light the stairs, up which they silently fled, Isabel's numbed feet stumbling and bruising themselves against each stair as she went. At the top of the stairs they found themselves in a room still warm with the embers of a slowly dying fire, before which the unhappy mother crouched, the

rug that had been thrown over her slipping away unregarded.

"Will it cry?" the young man asked, as he knelt beside her with sticks and matches to rekindle the fire. "We must not wake the people of the house. Speak low; all within these two rooms is at your service, such as it is. Thank Heaven, there's coal and a kettle full of water——"

"And a bath, a small one?" she interrupted, shivering violently but unconsciously. "And milk? Oh, to give him a draught of warm milk!"

"Condensed milk in a tin, if that will do," he replied, gazing on the white, agonized face by his side in a fury of pity, indignation, and tenderness, and observing the beauty of the features, the splendid hair falling in heavy swathes about mother and child, and the fine lines of the figure perceptible through the clinging folds of the thin gown. "Good Heavens! the poor little thing is suffocating! And you too cold to touch him!"

Isabel stifled a cry of despair. "What

*shall* I do? For the love of Heaven make the fire burn, make a hot bath, and heat milk. If I had but four arms! Oh, save him, save him! Rouse the house, do anything—only save my little boy!"

"All right, all right, we'll soon pull the little chap through," he returned, in a soothing voice. "But don't make a row—no need. Look here! I'm boiling the water like fun and I'll heat the milk on the spirit lamp, and here's a bath and here are towels and blankets; we'll heat them all in a brace of shakes. Only *don't* rouse the house, that's a good soul!—unless you want a doctor."

He flew lightly from room to room, putting candle ends and sugar on the fire to produce a quick blaze; the water was beginning to bubble, the milk heating on the spirit lamp, Isabel was still unconscious of all but the baby's urgent need, when he brought a quaint flask, whence he poured a greenish liquid into a small glass and held it to her quivering, white lips. "Drink," he said. "You are too cold to help the child; it will

warm you. It won't hurt you; it's only Chartreuse."

She allowed him to pour it between her lips, her arms still occupied with the child; the cordial sent a glow through her numbed, chilled limbs and crushed heart; she became conscious of her insufficient dress, and submitted to having one arm at a time put through the sleeves of a dressing gown, and made no objection when the young man, to his own great wonderment, gathered the long swathes of hair together, carefully and tenderly, but with the clumsiness of inexperience, and twisted all in one great tress behind out of the way, while the baby choked and struggled, with labouring breath and faint moans that should have been coughs.

"A curious midnight adventure for a grave young student," Arthur Hedley reflected, marvelling at the soft silkiness of the hair, marvelling at the lady's utter abandonment to the child's danger and total unconsciousness of himself, save as a minister to the boy's need, at her absolute disregard of her-

self and all the fine-meshed conventionalities of life; marvelling most of all at the fascination this concentrated feeling imparted to the singular beauty that he had so often admired and observed under the veils of clothing, custom, and distance, and now held like some lovely captured butterfly in his very hand, under his minute and immediate scrutiny. The stains on the child's face and her own had been removed, the first by the mother's hand, the second by his own, unnoticed by her, the sponging being very gently done; but marks of violence were still upon her, filling him with tempestuous emotion that was not all pity. The bright yellow hair coiled snakily round his fingers, while his heart throbbed and his eyes dilated. How could the husband of this beautiful and fascinating being do these things? What was he made of that he could not keep sober for such a woman? What was that whisper about a wife's faults? It is always the wife's fault in the world's opinion; the world is savage and unjust, ever ready to put the blame on the weak-

est; the world's mercy is cruel. Well, a woman might be hard, unloving, shrewish, impossible; she might drive a man to the mad relief of drink—but this savagery, this iconoclastic violence! If he drank he would not thus play the savage, surely. But there was no fear of his drinking; he was a most respectable young man. Even now he was wondering how soon he could disembarrass himself of these untimely, unconventional guests.

"I suppose," he said, while doing these various charitable offices, "it will be possible for you to get into your house before morning. He'll sleep it off, won't he? I would knock and ring till the door opened, then signal to you to cross over."

"I never try," she replied, too preoccupied for anything but bare, brief truth. "I always wait till the house is open and slip in as quietly as I can. He is very savage when sobering. Oh, the breathing is easier. That's the steam. Now the bath!"

Hedley's eyes gleamed strangely in the sidelong glance he threw on her face. She

seemed not to feel the horror of her case: her voice was hard and metallic; yet her face was alight with tenderest love and pity, and she was crooning soft baby talk to the child. Well, a cat croons tenderly to her brood, though she robs a bird's-nest for them.

"Pardon me," he added, "for worrying you in your anxiety, but I want to spare you the—ah!—that is, this adventure might not be well received, it might be unpleasantly gossiped over——"

"Gossip! My baby is dying, and you talk of gossip!"

"Nay, not dying, dear lady. See, he is quieting down; he'll soon be asleep. As soon as practicable we must get you home—before people are about."

"I shall never go home," she replied quite calmly, with the daily deepening feeling that her husband's violence was less hateful and less degrading even than his caresses.

"Have you no friends near?" he asked. "No house that could receive you? No? Could I telegraph to relatives to meet you

anywhere, if I wrapped you up and took you to the first train? *No* relatives?"

"None who care. Two married brothers, who live far off."

His heart swelled with pity, admiration, and a host of uncomprehended feelings. She spoke as if in a dream, her gaze absorbed in the child, whom she clasped again, after the hot plunge in the bath, to her breast. The little face had lost its dark hue and suffering look, the long eyelashes touched the round cheek, the limbs relaxed from their convulsive tension, the wheezing breath was no longer audible.

"Come, this is splendid," he said; "the little beggar is going to sleep."

"He *is* asleep," she replied in a hard voice, after listening a moment, with her head bent down, for the breathing. Then she looked up into Arthur's face with an expression that froze his blood, in a vacant, stony gaze, in which he saw that he had no part; a glaze came over her eyes, the colour left her face, she fell forward into his arms, senseless.

## CHAPTER II

### THE AWAKENING

EARLY next morning, while it was still dusk, loud knocking sounded on George Arnott's bedroom door. He turned and swore thickly, still heavy with the drunkard's sleep; the door opened, Charlotte stepped in, and, laying a vigorous hand on his shoulder, shook him with a will.

"What's now?" he growled, indignant at the unwonted liberty. "I can't go out. I'm ill. I'm dead."

"It's Master Harry, sir; dear little Master Harry, you turned out last night, you great brute beast!" she sobbed, clasping a white bundle in her unoccupied arm and continuing to shake him with the other.

"Eh! what?" he muttered, trying to collect his muddled wits and stay the whirl-

ing of his soddened brain, as he raised his head and looked round the dim room. "Mas'r Harry? Put Mas'r Harry in cot, Charlt. Put Mas' Har' cot," he stuttered, letting his hammering, leaden head fall back on the pillow and closing his bloodshot eyes in a comfortless sleep that was half stupor.

"If ever I marry a beast like that!" muttered Charlotte, as she left the unhallowed room.

The hours stole on into a chill leaden day. George Arnott woke and slumbered, and woke again with maledictions on his parched lips and the devil's own hatred and discontent in his heart. He knew these wakings well; he would fain have slept on and on forever to miss them. Sometimes in the exceeding dreariness of soul and wretchedness of body and mind such wakings bring he thought of sharp cutting things, and pondered which were easiest, an opened artery or such a quiet death draught as he had in the house, but without result. His hand was far too shaky for a scientific lancing, his

wretched mind much too shaky and irresolute for that piteous refuge of the moral leper. This morning he wept, and bitter desolation fell upon him. Where was Isabel, with her stony reproachful face and the cup of tea she usually administered? Her eyes had begun to haunt him; after all, it was a relief to be rid of her for a while. The creeping things that mock the senses in *delirium tremens* used to look at him with those haunting, reproachful eyes.

He felt so wretched this morning that the return of those horrors might be imminent; he must either resort to death draughts or knives or keep from liquor altogether for a time. "But how keep from liquor?" he pondered, removing his miserable body from bed to bath and clothes. It needed a stronger will and firmer nerve than he possessed for that. If Isabel would but save him from himself!

Strange, he reflected, that he had once loved Isabel; stranger still that she had seemed to return his love. Selfish, heartless

jade, cold and cruel and unforgiving. She was his curse; with another woman he would have been another man. But that white face of reproach, those pained and scornful eyes, the way she had of shuddering from his touch and flinching at his voice. She would bring him tea with the air of one feeding a noxious beast, half disgust, half terror in her look. Why was the jade absent this morning? Had he struck last night that little too hard that sometimes brings such unfortunate husbands as he to police courts? There had certainly been violence, as far as he could remember. Had he turned her out of doors? No doubt he had; she was always so exasperating when he came home a little behind time. Many men in his place would have murdered her long before.

Trying to disentangle the muddy confusion of his addled memory he swore at his own mental impotence, at the confounded brushes and clothes that eluded his shaking grasp—at everything. His bloodshot eyes fell, unseeing, on the portraits Isabel had

observed last night. No one could have believed him the original of that young man. His hair was prematurely grizzled, loose bags under his haggard eyes added years to his apparent age; his face had the bloated flesh and blurred features of his vice, his figure had lost all spring and comeliness.

Suddenly he thought of the child, and turned to the cot in which the little form was visible. Still asleep? Poor little beggar, his rest had been broken in the night. After all, it was hard luck for him. What was this paper on the table? Isabel's nursing record of Harry's temperature, breathing, food, and medicine. His hand shook more than ever as he read it, his clouded brain clearing, professional habit become instinct, returning as he read, and remembered the child's critical condition, his own orders and the mother's careful observance of them. The paper ended at midnight, "breathing easier, still sleeping." With a stifled cry he went to the cot, his heart hammering loudly, and looked.

Harry was lying very still and straight on his back, his tiny hands clasped on his quiet breast, a sweet smile on his waxen face. His father had no need to kiss the peaceful brow and feel its icy chill to know that he would wake and suffer no more. He had no need to feel the rigid limbs to know that he had been dead many hours, and was already prepared for his last narrow bed, his soft, golden curls smoothed above his sweet, innocent face. In the sobering of this awful truth he knew all—that he had driven his wife out into the bitter night with more bitter blows and his baby in her arms. He saw that in his drunken fury he had killed his own only child.

His brain was quite clear now; a vast illumination seemed to sweep over its long-clouded surface, the veil was torn away from everything in his whole life. Harry lay smiling in the peace of death before him—dear, cherished Harry, for whose sake he was always going to keep sober; sweet, innocent Harry, who was just beginning to be

so fascinating with his broken prattle and marvellous bursts of intelligence and drollery—the cooing voice, the pattering steps were stilled forever, the loving gaze of the deep blue eyes was forever darkened, the smile quenched, the warm clinging of round arms and pressure of rosy lips forever lost. Only an ice-cold simulacrum, deaf, blind, and dumb, remained, white and still, with faintly tinted lips. Harry was gone forever. The child was old enough to be frightened at such scenes as last night's; he had been still alive, for his father remembered the feeble wail. Isabel's paper showed that he was recovering rapidly. Maud had been frightened; she was two and a half, she died in convulsions. Maud's death had been the occasion of a deeper plunge hellward for him, he had been obliged to drown that memory and Isabel's passionate reproaches and grief. Better have drowned himself, better never have been born; the curse in his blood was too dark. Best end it all now, here, by the side of his murdered son. Yet he did not.

Something in that face of carven innocence forbade it. Perhaps a look of the babe's mother, a hint of his own mother, a reflection of the sister dead in her teens, who had been the finest influence and a purifying sorrow of his youth.

He rang the bell and Charlotte answered it, a strange, furtive expression on her face.

"Come in and shut the door and tell me what you know of this," he said in a calm, restrained voice, pointing to the cot. "Don't be afraid; I'm not drunk. I shall never be drunk any more. He has been dead many hours. I suppose I turned him out last night with his mother when I came home."

Charlotte's tear-washed face went very white. "You killed him!" she cried fiercely.

"Yes, I killed him," he replied, with dreadful calm. "But how? I was too drunk to know. I could not have struck him. There is no mark of violence on him. He was very ill. The chill might have done it easily, or the fright. I want to know

exactly how I killed my son, Charlotte," he added in a clear, cold voice.

The girl's face went whiter. "Oh, sir, how could you!" she faltered. "We heard him cry when you came home—and mistress —we heard her, poor thing! Then the door slammed and we didn't hear nothing more. This morning early there was a ring at the door, a nasty creepy sort of ring, as made me shiver. I thought to myself, 'It must be mistress come home early,' though she don't ring in general, but waits till the door has been opened, which I do first thing I comes down for her. I hadn't finished dressing this morning, but come down as I was; and there, when I opened the door, there was nobody. It give me a turn. It wasn't hardly light, but the street lamps was out. Up along and down along I looked, but there was nobody nowhere, only two men passed down along opposite, going to work. Then I looked down and seen—oh, sir!—I seen dear little Master Harry on the step, wrapped up and quiet. I thought first

it was a bundle of clothes. I took it up, and there—there—was his dear little face, white and so quiet——"

"And cold?" in the same awful calm.

"Oh, sir!" she sobbed, "ice—ice—is warm to it."

"Where is Mrs. Arnott?"

"The Lord knows. Last time she said they wouldn't take her in no more, and she didn't know where to go. She'd used 'em all up."

Silence, interrupted by the girl's choking sobs; then Arnott spoke again.

"Who knows besides yourself of what you found on the doorstep?" he asked.

"Nobody. But I was that upset I couldn't but say something. So I said I'd been in and found the little dear died in the night, quite peaceful; and all the blinds is drawn down to make no talk in the town."

"You are a good girl, Charlotte," he said in that gentle, unemotional voice. "And you are no fool. So listen! If you tell this thing there may be an inquest, and I may be

charged and even convicted of manslaughter. That would be penal servitude for a term of years. It would be just, because I killed my poor baby. But it would be hard on Mrs. Arnott. It would be starvation and disgrace added on to her present misery. If you say nothing, I simply write a certificate, giving a natural cause of death, and there is no inquest and no scandal. If you think it wrong to let me go free consider your poor mistress, and remember that I shall carry this about with me my life long, branded and burnt into me. How do you think a man would feel with *that*"—he suddenly shrieked, pointing to the sweet still face in the cot—"always between him and God's sun and man's smile, between him and his daily bread, between him and his nightly slumber, painted on the darkness. Oh, Charlotte, Charlotte! I shall always be in hell while I live and wherever I live. I shall never, never—have one moment without—oh, God!—I cannot undo it—never, never—forever."

Heavy sobs tore and shook him as he sat, his face bowed upon his hands, his strong body crushed beneath his agony. Charlotte's more facile, feminine tears returned to their source, her eyes grew haggard with horror and amazement, in which some compassion mingled, though she was not aware of it. She looked at the tranquil angel face that last night had been so full of suffering, half for reassurance, half in grief that the high and holy peace of death should be thus outraged by sounds of guilty pain in its presence. Her pale, drawn lips forbade speech till the storm of agony subsided and the miserable father raised his wet face once more.

"What is it to be?" he asked then, in a voice that startled her by its absolute calm. "Silence or told over the town?"

"Silence," was the awed reply.

"Right, Charlotte, right. But remember," he added, after a heavy pause, "all hangs on you. You are an honest woman and trustworthy. Ycu have been kind to your mistress in her trouble. You'll be so

still. Go and prepare a place for—the child—in the next room. Buy flowers, make it look—as women like those things."

When he went downstairs to do some of those sad, necessary things that death exacts he looked more like himself than he had done for months, purified by his great grief and calmed by its passionate outburst. More like himself, and therefore more sensitive to the squalid misery of the life his vice inflicted on his wife. On the hall table lay a toy horse, little Harry's delight, broken. The poor child liked to have it in his cot, he remembered. It must have been in his hand last night, and dropped when he was driven out to his death in the darkness.

Entering the dining room, where breakfast was laid for two, in the midday sunbeams that crept through the drawn blinds, he saw himself, distorted and multiplied in the splintered mirror, with a disgust and loathing he had never felt before. Poor Isabel, to be driven from such a home! Yet other women endured such things and for-

gave and loved on; yes, and even saw their helpless children wronged and, more or less directly, slain.

The breakfast had not been touched. Why was she not there as usual, with that face, white and wearing its look of maddened patience and restrained disgust? Sometimes that weary face was bruised and cut; always it exasperated him by its witness to his own brutality and degradation. Why must that straggling sunbeam point with accusing finger at those dark stains on the wall? She might have taken those stains out. The broken furniture might have been mended; such stolid ways as these madden men. A pile of accumulated letters; they were chiefly bills and threats from exasperated creditors long unpaid. Patients were becoming fewer and fewer day by day. Sitting down to the dreary table he drank many cups of tea, eating nothing. A spirit decanter on the sideboard winked a sunbeam from its cut surface with the old familiar temptation in its sparkle. Strange, but it

had no power this morning, at the very moment when the craving was wont to be most invincible. Nay, he turned from it with a sick disgust that grew and grew. Oh that Isabel would come home! She had never been so late before. He always found the eye he feared to meet at his board after such a scene as last night's. She was used to shelter somewhere in the night, he asked not where, then they sat in wretched silence or spoke of some unavoidable triviality. He could have borne upbraiding, tears, curses better—he was wont to think. At first there had always been some attempt at apology. At first? It was now such a long-established thing he scarcely remembered the first turning out of doors, or even the first blow. That *she* remembered both he had no doubt.

The first outbreak of the chained demon had occurred a year after marriage, after an influenza epidemic, during which he had overworked, with the malaria in his own blood, though not sufficiently to confine him

to his bed, as befell all his medical brothers one after the other at the time, with half his household prostrate and his wife, then perilously near her first confinement, just recovering from the scourge. So then, in his hour of weakness, the fiend had met and mastered him.

Isabel could never understand, she took the inebriated ravings seriously, her want of comprehension led to quarrelling and recrimination. But one day she understood. It was then that she lost her unborn child and went near to losing her life as well.

That had been the end of their happiness. She had forgiven; he had promised amendment. But there had been no more joy. So he lost heart and went from bad to worse.

After this wretched attempt to breakfast he went out on some necessary errands, visited some long-suffering patients and returned to his desolate house. Still no Isabel. He exhausted himself in conjecture and supposition, questioned the faithful Charlotte as to her mistress's habitual resort

on such occasions, and sent her round with inquiries. But no one had seen Mrs. Arnott that day.

He went up to the darkened room in which the little body lay among flowers, white and fragrant. He wondered that the mother could keep away from it. Women love to nurse their griefs and cling desperately to the vacated shrines of their idols; he often had to force mothers away from tiny corpses. It must have been Isabel who washed and straightened Harry for his grave, but to leave him in the open street on the doorstep! How could she thus war against her instincts? Was her anger greater than her grief, even greater than her love?

Not very long ago he had come home at dusk and paused at the open door of this dim, fireless room to see Harry enthroned on the sofa where he now lay dead, in the firelight, rosy and laughing; kneeling at his baby feet was his mother, worshipping him, holding some shining toy at which he

clutched with pretty babble and crows of delight. The toy was dropped and the boy caught and smothered with kisses till he kicked and scolded himself free, when the game began again. Firelight danced on golden curl, dimpled cheek, and round, soft, baby arm; also upon a woman's beautiful face, softened by love and alight with a joy that faded at his own appearance. Poor woman! She had had one strong consolation in the squalid misery of her life, and there it lay, white and cold and dead by his hand, before him. And where now was that happy mother?

He clinched his hands till the nails wounded the palms and his teeth till they ached, but he did not feel it. He made some fresh disposition of the flowers and white drapery the maids had placed there. So, he thought, a mother would like to see her little one. The sun was still in the sky, but there must be lights ready in case she did not return till dusk. Children were coming out of school; he heard them in the street, dancing

by with shouts and laughter. A fluty boy-voice was calling "Mother." Harry would never go to school, or laugh or shout or sing, or call "Mother." The sturdy little form and round cheeks seemed to reproach him in their mute stillness, demanding the cup of life, thus shattered at the first sip. He was made so strongly and so well, so fit for life and all its battles and triumphs. "Why am I robbed," the rosebud mouth seemed to say, "of my threescore and ten years of life? What have I done, that I should so soon be scattered to the elements? You owed me my body's life, who caused it. I had but you to cherish it. I was quite unable to fight for it myself. Where is the merry active boyhood such as you enjoyed—all the magic of wakening fancy and unfolding intelligence, all the marvel and mystery of opening mind and heart? Where is the flowering of adolescence and manhood, of power and passion, hope and aspiration, the keen joys of doing and daring, acquiring knowledge and exercising skill? Where the fairy dreams of

the ideal, the illimitable possibilities of life? All that men ever were I might have been."

He would have given his own life twice over to recall the life to that sweet little body, give all he had ever hoped for one sound from the frozen lips. Had he not always been going to reform for Harry's sake, and had he not been more proud of this sturdy little fellow than of all the others?

The day darkened to its decline as he sat there, listening to the mute reproaches of the dead boy, till his brain seemed one flame, shapes loomed threatening in the shadows, and the heart within him was one throb of agony. Then he turned away and went shivering to his lonely fireside, still pursued by reproaching phantoms of the boy, the youth, and the man the dead baby should have been. Charlotte brought him tea and coffee, hot soups and food, but he turned from all but the tea, and either crouched miserably over the fire or paced restlessly up and down the room, listening and watching

and hoping against hope for Isabel's step and voice.

At last, when the household had long gone to rest, he went to his room, leaving, as Isabel had done the night before, a banked-up fire and light, with a sad sense of the futility of it, and lay dressed on the bed, wakeful and tormented with horrible fears. He had left the street door unlocked. At times he fancied a hand on the lock and started up to feel the silence broken now and again by a solitary footstep or belated wheels. He thought of Isabel's vigils on that same bed and the violence and degradation with which they too often ended.

Poor Isabel! He began to wonder how women bore these things. If she were unforgiving, she had a good deal to forgive; if resentful, much to resent. Once in prenuptial days a drunken man had crossed their path in a country road. His indignation had been great that such a sight should insult her eyes. Her shudder of

repulsion and look of horror and disgust, as she clung to his arm and he led her rapidly away haunted him. "He poisons the sunshine," she told him afterward. Poor Isabel!

## CHAPTER III

### THE FORLORN HOPE

NEXT morning was sunny and bright, with a sparkle of hoar frost in the air. Hollies and arbutus trees outside the window of a red-gabled house beyond the town gleamed in ruddy light; robins and thrushes hopped over the whitened grass that smoked in the sunbeams, expecting crumbs. Dr. Marston, the leading practitioner of the place, was sitting at table with his face buried in a newspaper, sipping coffee and eating his breakfast in hurried, alternate jerks, while his wife supplied his wants and watched for an opportunity to put in some necessary word before he was off and away for the morning. A boy and girl chattered together over their breakfast, and then jumped up and danced off with their books to their respective schools.

Then the doctor threw down his hastily conned paper and swallowed his coffee with cheerful satisfaction, and Mrs. Marston poured in her tale and received her answer with affectionate pleasure.

"By the way," the doctor added, "Arnott has lost his baby. Poor woman, I *am* sorry for her."

"Oh, I was going to inquire to-day. The last account was, 'going on well.' Poor thing!"

"I wish you would call on her oftener, Marian. She must need a friend. It's an awful life for a sensitive, refined creature like poor Mrs. Arnott."

"Oh, she's so reticent and unsociable. Always out or engaged when people come. Once when I called there was a horrid scene; she was quite overcome. 'Don't come again,' she said when I went; 'there is no help. One can but hide up these sores. I would leave him but for the child.' Then it came out that she had nothing of her own and nobody but a married brother to go to."

"Poor chap!"

"Poor chap, indeed! Poor woman! For pity's sake, Robert, don't waste pity on that brute."

"No waste, my dear. Arnott might have done so well. He's an extremely good surgeon. Not bad-hearted. His manner is pleasant and reassuring; a little bluff, perhaps."

"Not bad-hearted! I wonder what men can be made of when I hear them judging and excusing one another. A drunken brute who turns his wife into the street at night, who knocks her about by day, neglects his business and ruins his prospects! Not bad-hearted! When everybody knows why that poor, broken-hearted thing goes about in a thick veil! Of course I shall call presently and see what I can do for her; equally, of course, she won't see me and the brute will be drunk."

"My *dear!*"

Respectability was written in large characters all over Dr. Marston, propriety was

in his every word and look, yet he was esteemed a kind, even a genial man. No matter at what hour or in what extremity of peril he was summoned, he was always speckless; his sedate collar fresh, his black tie beautifully knotted, his diamond pin twinkling upon it, his beard never more than six hours old. It was rumoured that he slept in the diamond pin and had himself shaved and brushed at intervals during the night. It was certain that the diamonds had twinkled fresh hope into many a despairing heart, and the gloss of the silk hat and precision of the frock coat steadied many shaken nerves. There was reassurance in the glitter of his sleeve links, pulses steadied at the tick of his solid gold watch and quieted under his cool and steady fingers. Even disease had to behave properly under that grave and searching eye; there was no skulking from that penetrating gaze by the most insidious malady: out from the most secret recesses of the system it had to come with its longest name distinctly labelled

upon it. No one but his wife had ever suspected Robert Marston of weakness, and even she was at times impressed by his perfection and awed by his superiority.

"The brute will be drunk," she repeated firmly. "No doubt he neglected the poor child and knows it. So he will have to drown his remorse. I wonder she didn't insist on his calling some one in to attend the little boy."

"Poor Arnott!" repeated Dr. Marston, unshaken. "I shall be in to luncheon, my dear," he added in the hall, as he pulled his coat on.

"Well, Arnott, well!" he said, when, a little later, he stepped into the Arnotts's darkened, defaced room, his grave, calm face distorted in the shattered mirror. "This is a sad business for you—a very sad business."

Arnott remembered vaguely, while resigning his hand to his brother practitioner's continuous warm shake, that the latter had refused to meet him in consultation some time since, and wondered why he had come.

"I came to see what I could do for you," the visitor continued. "See patients for you, or, in short, anything there is to be done. Mrs. Marston hopes to be of some service to Mrs. Arnott. In the meantime, how are you both? Upset, of course. You've had no sleep. That's wrong, very wrong. You can't bring the poor little man back, you know. I hope there was not much suffering. Bronchitis? Well, that soon carries off an infant. Come now, let us hear all about it. A fine little fellow, the picture of health. But the healthy ones get these acute attacks, you remember; the little frail life is so soon quenched. I wish you had sent for me, though of course you did all that could be done. You've eaten nothing to-day, my friend. Come, let us have the pulse. This won't do, you know—won't do—won't do."

Arnott looked hopelessly into the grave, wholesome face, set in its gray garnish of hair, and read the sympathy in the shrewd, clear eyes, responding by monosyllables and resigning his hand to the professional clasp.

"I'm a miserable man," he burst out at last. "I was drunk at the time."

"You've been drinking pretty freely for some time, by all appearances, my poor friend," the doctor added tranquilly. "You've pulled up just in time, Arnott. Perhaps the poor little boy's death may be a turning point for you—who knows? The poor mother! For her it may be a blessing in disguise. It's a sad pity, you know—a sad pity: a man with your knowledge and capacity. The rest of us would give something to be able to operate as you did in that *appendicitis* case. Let me treat you, dear fellow. You'll have a hard fight now, with this trouble upon you. But I needn't tell you where it will end if you don't make a stand. Mrs. Arnott is young for all this trouble, poor soul. You'll make a stand for her sake, eh? You've got a will, you know, if you will exercise it. Don't stay indoors and brood. How is she?"

"Heaven knows," returned Arnott, fixing his gloomy eyes despairingly on the doc-

tor's kind face; "I don't. She's not been heard of since—since—I turned her out into the bitter night and killed her child. Yes, you may well start and drop my hand. That's how he came by his death, Marston."

"Poor chap—poor, unfortunate chap!" said the doctor, laying his strong, firm hand on George's heaving shoulder. "A stern warning for you, Arnott. But don't despair, man; don't despair. Now about the poor wife. She must have left some clew to her whereabouts. She must be found. No doubt her resentment at present overbears everything. But in time that will soften—women forgive so much."

"And so little," added George. "I think my wife had long ago come to hate me. She never forgave the first—burst."

"And you never forgave her for being wronged, eh? Come, you must make her forget. Think what she has suffered—is suffering."

"Think? I've been thinking of it all night long. I shall think of it while I have

any brain left. I've ruined her, spoilt her home, destroyed her happiness, killed her children, outraged her feelings, made her a byword and a spectacle. Great Heavens, Marston, what must it be to have a hog for a husband, to be subject to the violence of a drunken savage——"

"Come, come, come. Useless to brood. Find her, comfort her, make her a happier home."

"I had to pawn things for the very coffin," he sobbed. "I'm threatened with bailiffs. See what I've done to this room! My practice is gone. But if she would only—only come back!"

"She'll come back, man, never fear. No doubt she is afraid to come back yet. She doesn't know what she may find; dreads the hog and savage you spoke of. If, as you say, she was quite destitute of clothing, she must be at hand. Probably ill in bed somewhere, stunned with the double shock. A woman cannot go far with neither clothes nor money. She'll recover, send for her

clothes, and in time let you bring her back. Now, look here, I'll go into your surgery and make up something for you. Then you'll let me diet you and put you under a strict *regimen*, and in a week or two you'll be your own man again. And don't let your tempter be within reach of you. A reaction will follow all this agitation, and then you know what to expect."

"No trace of a woman who left her home in a nightdress?" cried Mrs. Marston. "Robert, she is in the river. The tide will have carried her out to sea by this time."

"I fear that you may be right, my dear, but don't let Arnott think it, for the love of Heaven. Yet there is a strong presumption against it, in the fact that another life is involved in hers. Instinct is strong, especially that instinct."

"Oh, but a drunkard's child! And after this tragedy. The river, Robert, the river! A pond or stream by this time——".

"Then, my dear, think of that bitter cold night, the exposure, and the mental agony

together. But, in that case, we shall know before many days. I cling to the hope that she is sheltered under some good Samaritan's roof, prostrate with a grief from which she will presently recover. Let us stand by the man, Marian, at all events, if only for her sake. I can lend him a little money. His father may help him. That will be something toward a fresh start—expecting the poor wronged wife the main motive; though, to be candid, the kindest thing would be to put a pistol to his head without delay."

All these possibilities respecting the missing wife had suggested themselves to the unhappy Arnott over and over again, with more or less lurid accompaniments of horror and pain, as days glided on, the little body was borne to its resting place, and the ever-expected footstep was still unheard. But always that faint possibility of the mother instinct preserving life triumphed over absolute despair, and made a motive to live on and struggle with bitterest temptation.

Will she come?—she will come. The two phrases beat like a pulse through all his thoughts, sufferings, and struggles. The pale, rigid face and scornful eyes that he had of late grown to fear and dislike vanished from remembrance, and were replaced by the young one in its fresh beauty, illumined by love and happiness, a face unbruised, bright eyes not yet outraged by drunken violence and hideous experience. Old memories woke and lived, rending and torturing the long-deadened heart. The first time of seeing her, the trivialities that brought them more closely acquainted, the singular intensifying of life and vividness of enjoyment that seemed to have no underlying cause, the growing consciousness of acute pleasure in the society of one, the sudden joyous agonizing revelation, brought about in a flash, by Heaven knows what trifle, that this was love of purest type and intensity. These things so long out of mind made the present seem doubly hideous and incredible. He had taken a lovely blossom of woman-

hood to himself. He had been so proud of her.

He began to be always listening for the light young footstep of those days, not the weary, listless one of later years, and looking for the slender, springy form and young, happy face, not for that white and contemptuous yet fearful countenance, marred by violence. Sometimes her laugh, heart-whole and pleasant, seemed to echo through the desolate house, or some smart repartee or lively sally sounded again—how gay and bright she used to be! He had forgotten that she had not laughed for so long. She had danced well. She used to sing charmingly. His people had thought much of her.

Then he would see her waiting, waiting in dread and disgust for his staggering step, recall the furtive interrogation of her glance and the heartsick certainty with which it was averted from his dull and stupid gaze, recall things that cannot be spoken and that she had borne. Again he would see her in

the bitter night wind, shivering and shuddering, creeping into some grudged corner with shame and pain, see her nursing the poor boy, with spasms of fear and hope, see her vainly trying to shelter him on that last night. Then—a terrible face, frozen and still, would look up with sightless eyes full of horror and despair from some ditch or sheltering thicket. Surely it would be discovered and brought home one day, and the eyes, fixed forever in stony despair, would never cease to follow him, piercing through day and night, life and death, sleeping and waking—through the depths of the sea, the distance of years, and the darkness of the grave, and asking, always asking, for her children and her desecrated love and outraged faith, her shattered hope and crushed self-respect. With these visions the old temptation had power, but there was no means of yielding in the house, and at these times he took refuge with the Marstons or even with kind, homely Charlotte, and they knew how to help him.

The bailiffs came, and after a short sojourn were removed. George Arnott's father paid off his debts and set him on his feet once more. Then the servants were sent away—all except Charlotte and a nondescript boy—the stable and its contents given up. The broken things were removed from the house and the stain covered with a fresh wall paper. The house was somewhat bare and very desolate, but clean and orderly, and with relics of the child and Isabel's personal possessions in their accustomed places to welcome her.

Sometimes Charlotte found him, his face of a livid pallor, with clinched teeth and hands, struggling with an agony of desire for his subtile enemy; sometimes sitting for hours nerveless and exhausted, numb and dumb with heavy despair. For each mood she had some remedy, ineffectual in itself, but possessing the sovereign balm that human sympathy and affection never fail to bring. Cups of tea were Charlotte's panacea for every human ill—mental, moral, or physical.

These her master sometimes derided, sometimes raged at, sometimes drank, without in the least shaking her faith in them.

About a month after the double loss there was a mission to Barton town, and the good Charlotte, worn and saddened by her late experiences, found herself one evening at an informal service in a homely room full of working people on rough benches, singing hymns to swinging tunes, joining in prayers, or listening to brief and homely addresses.

A tall man, with burning eyes and a sort of masterful gentleness in his strong and deeply lined face, pervaded the room, dressed in a cassock, distributing books and leaflets. Now and then he stopped by some one who had attracted his piercing gaze, and murmured in an attentive ear something unheard by the crowd. A woman sitting in front of Charlotte had been crying bitterly till he came to her, laid a kind hand on her shoulder, listened attentively to what she told him and said something that was evidently consoling in reply, making an appointment for

her and recording it in a notebook. The same thing happened with a shamefaced lad, whose broken murmurs were so low and stammering that the missioner had difficulty in gathering their meaning. Charlotte was impressed; but it was not until the assembly was melting away after the final hymn and benediction that this man caught her wistful gaze and paused by her side with, "Well, my child, is it sin, or sorrow, or doubt, or only ignorance?" in a voice that went to her heart, making her give way with a sudden sob and falter:

"Please, sir; it's master."

"Yes?" The clean-shaven face showed a kind and grave interest, but no surprise; the long, strong hand touched her shoulder with magnetic, reassuring effect. The missioner looked simply expectant; yet Charlotte felt, while her eyes seemed to be examining the fringed ends of his sash, that every line in her face and figure was being read like the characters of a printed page.

"Poor master has dreadful trouble, and

he doesn't believe anything." She added, "Couldn't you come and comfort him?"

He patted her shoulder gently with a softened light in his eyes, glanced round to see that they were not overheard, and said: "Tell me his name and his trouble, and we will pray together for him." So she told him briefly of George's recent losses.

Ten minutes later found the two in the street at George Arnott's door.

"Tell your master some one to see him. If he asks who it is say a clergyman," was the order when Charlotte opened the door and took him to the consulting room, whither George at once repaired on the announcement.

"It certainly *is* little Arnott," the missioner said, bending his keen gaze upon George and offering his hand. "Don't you remember Philip Sternroyd, of the Sixth Form, and the lickings you used to get? I am here as a missioner with some of our brotherhood—known as the Upton Fathers."

"Yes, I remember Sternroyd," George

replied listlessly, his sombre glance falling after a moment's interrogation, and his hand remaining unresponsive in the other's warm grasp. "I was your fag. You soon went up to Oxford. You took honours, I think."

"And you?—we used to hear so little of our juniors."

"I got a scholarship—Cambridge—but—only my degree. Then—hospitals—I'd gone the pace at Cambridge, but steadied afterward. I'm a wreck, but no matter."

"Poor lad! Well, it's an old story, only they don't always steady afterward. Poor lad! And heavy sorrow has come upon you, I hear. That nice young servant of yours brought me here, don't you know. Come and comfort master, was the order, so I came. Then I remembered little Arnott as we came along. I'm awfully glad to see you again, Arnott; it brings back old times. I've often said to myself, 'Wonder what became of little Arnott?' You were a jolly little chap and took your lickings like a man. I'm afraid you didn't always deserve

them. Do say you're glad to see me, Arnott."

"If I could be glad of anything I might," was the heavy rejoinder.

"My lad, you are in the depths," the missioner said, his voice deepening, his face becoming solemn. "The sorrows of death have encompassed you. The pains of hell have got hold upon you. It is in your face and *voice* and the touch of your hand. You have recently lost, I am told, both wife and child—that is sorrow enough. But it's deeper even than that. It is spiritual anguish and wrestling with the powers of darkness. George, you may not believe in God, but you are at this moment fighting on his side; and you are not alone, believe me. I am here by what seems a curious chance and is the will of Heaven, whose accredited minister I am, to tell you that you are conquering and to conquer in this awful strife; that though you think yourself in darkness, you are near the light; that what seems to you intolerable agony is the benediction of your

Heavenly Father, drawing you from the mire of misery to His breast; that though you have lien among the pots, you are to be as the wings of a dove; and though blind, you are to see. The Almighty arms are round about you, the begrimed powers of Heaven are succouring you. I am *sure* that I am sent to tell you this and convey the blessing of God to you this night."

Silence and the missioner's magnetic glance fixed upon the gloomy, despairful eyes, in which some faint light of hope seemed kindling, and wonder and doubt, anguish and shame, and fear struggling amid a curious, wistful interrogation that searched the veracity of the man's face and words. After this long interchange of looks that on neither side blenched a moment, a deep, sobbing sigh shook George Arnott's strong chest and he opened his parched lips.

"And if I am an infidel?" he panted.

"You will not long be an infidel. If you cannot yet believe you will still fight on in the darkness; but not alone. For the pow-

ers of light defend you and the great cloud of witnesses encompass you."

"A murderer?"

"For even such there is pardon and peace and abundance of healing."

"But if I have murdered a soul as well as a body?" he whispered, almost hissed.

"Then God help you, George Arnott!" the missioner replied, with a shudder and a changed face. "He *can* help, for His mercy is infinite," he added.

"Ah! but the murdered soul?" in a voice that shook the priest's heart.

"No soul can be murdered without its own consent," the latter returned. "Led astray, hurt, darkened, but its blood upon its own head. Man must let that alone forever."

"And rejoice in eternal bliss while the murdered soul is in torment? And rejoice on earth with *that* knowledge?" cried George.

The missioner changed colour and trembled. He was still a moment before he re-

plied, in the deep, bell-like voice that had moved so many hearts:

"His mercy endureth forever. He bids us pray, he bids us hope, bids us love—*forever*," dwelling deeply on the last word.

"Ah, but does He? Do not Christians preach and teach and believe that His mercy ends with the grave?" was the despairing rejoinder.

"Nay, nay. His wrath endureth but the twinkling of an eye, my brother; but His mercy endureth forever."

"That's a broad faith, Sternroyd."

"As broad as the eternal heavens, Arnott, and as true. It is so written in the Holy Book. Though we know nothing, we believe much; we hope more. We are sure of love and forgiveness. We formulate and accept dogma, we obey the church, we know the power of prayer and of sacraments from our own experience; but we believe in One above and beyond all that, who is not bound by man's limitations, whose thoughts are not as man's thoughts. Trust, George, trust,

and love, fight, and conquer, for you are no coward—no weakling."

They had been standing face to face, hand in hand, the magnetic personality of the missioner growing from moment to moment upon the desolate and hungry heart of the penitent. But Sternroyd was fasting and very weary, a sigh of physical need and nervous reaction escaped him, his hand relaxed its clasp, the fire of his eyes went out, and with it the new hope in George's storm-tossed soul.

"I could trust *you*, Sternroyd," he said sadly, as each sank into a chair, "but I am neither brave nor strong, and you don't know what a brute I have been."

"I know the secrets of many sinful and degraded souls. I know so much of the darker side of humanity that nothing could surprise me now. I see that you have been a heavy drinker, George, He who drinks unchains a legion of demons to run riot in his soul. We all know that. No doubt you have been a brute. But trust;

if you cannot yet put your trust higher trust *me*."

He looked at George as he spoke with the old magnetic light returning to his gaze, the old vibrant power to his voice. Then the desolate man's heart opened to his comforter, and he trusted him and told him all. And when the missioner stepped out into the starlight and plodded back to his lodging with an uplifted heart in his tired body, the small hours being well advanced, hope and an earnest of future peace were awake in George's soul.

The Arnotts had mixed so little of late in the restricted society of Barton that poor Mrs. Arnott's disappearance made no void in it, though the usual small-town rumours circulated: The Arnott's baby dead. Poor little thing, and such a fine child! So sad for poor Mrs. Arnott! So Arnott drank? This would make him worse than ever. Was it true that he was violent? Known for a fact. That was why she gave up visiting. They were in debt. Why did he drink? His

home not happy; something repellent in Mrs. Arnott. But where *was* Mrs. Arnott? No doubt, it was said later, she had left him; had but kept to him so long for the child's sake. The sooner the brute drank himself to death the better. She had taken away his last chance. But Arnott did not know where his wife was. He was distracted with grief. No one knew where she was. The police were making inquiries. These things, with variations, were recited over tea tables, at clubs, in the streets.

"Why, Hedley," some one said in the club smoking room on the evening of the missioner's visit to George, "you must have seen some lively scenes from your window if half they say is true. They say the poor thing was often turned out of doors in her nightdress and took refuge at the greengrocer's in the middle of the night. Is that true?"

"I don't as a rule pass the night looking out of my sitting-room window," was the reply, between biting the end off a cigar and

lighting it. Oh, yes! I knew poor Mrs. Arnott by sight very well. Fine woman? She was tall and walked well. Of course there would be queer rumours if, as you say, she suddenly left her husband. Certainly I've met Arnott. I thought him a surly brute. Thank you, my brother is better."

"Wouldn't he like somebody to call and cheer him up a bit?"

"Thank you so much. Not yet, I think. He has to be kept very quiet, poor boy."

"He's been ill a long time. Surely he ought to have medical advice, Hedley. Why, he came at least a month ago. One stormy night, don't you remember?"

"Oh, he's all right—used to these attacks. He hates doctors. I and my landlady manage him between us. Now I must go home and look after him. Good-night."

"Something rather fishy about this sick brother of Hedley's that nobody has ever seen, not even a doctor," was the first remark after his exit. "Yet he's a steady fellow."

"Hedley the spotless! Hedley the per-

fect! Well, why shouldn't he have a sick brother, spotless or not? Fancy a woman in a nightdress running away and not being traced anywhere! It's the want of clothes more than anything that balks the escaped convict. I used to know Mrs. Arnott. Rather a taking woman, tall and noticeable. I suspect her brute of a husband knows where she is. He's been very grim and quiet and unsociable ever since."

"Come, you don't mean a police case."

"I suspect his back garden or some corner of his cellars holds a tragic secret, Mowbray. A light? The man is cowed and never stirs out except on business. The poor thing may have jumped into the river, but the body would have been found. People don't vanish like that by fair means."

"Arnott seemed a decent fellow when first he came. He attended my people; clever, kind, pleasant. But once he came three sheets in the wind, and my wife wouldn't overlook it. Mrs. Arnott was sociable in those days, but—there was a something, a

hardness—I don't know, but I never cared for her. My wife said she was too superior. Still I do pity the poor thing and hope she'll turn up all right again. So Hedley's leaving, I hear? We shall be rid of a lot of virtue when he goes. His people are the great London solicitors, don't you know. He came here for quiet after overwork."

The missioner went to George Arnott the next night and the next, and when the mission was finished he wrote regularly to him. "Something tells me that your wife is still in this life," was a frequent phrase in these letters.

George caught at the hope, and this kept him in Barton, where it gradually became known that his life had become regular and sober, even religious.

A year passed with no trace of Isabel, then another year, and another, and still George Arnott hoped against hope for tidings of the missing wife, whose own relations had long given her up for lost. And still that hope was a defence from temptation in hours of weakness.

# CHAPTER IV

## PANSY

THE cottage, buried in flowers and greenery, almost reached the forest at the kitchen-garden end, the flower garden opened on the highroad that cut across the green, which was surrounded by houses and gardens and the village church and rectory. A porch with seats in it shadowed the open door leading into the cool little hall, a plot of grass with flower beds, lilac bushes, an arbour and garden seats was in front, a row of beehives in the kitchen garden discernible from the side of the cottage, all was ordered comfort and rural peace, with picturesque charm in the ruddy brown roof, steeply pitched, in orchard trees, box hedges, and forest background.

A dark-eyed child with bronzy-brown

curls tumbling over her shoulders, danced and sang about the garden, making a playmate of everything, as lonely children do. She was slender and graceful in her short frock and white sun hat, her height showing about five years of age, her joy in the sunshine and summer air was the unconscious, unspoilt joy of a young animal unsouled. Hearing a man's quick step upon the dusty road, she turned, continuing her inarticulate song, and danced down to the gate, where the postman stopped and delivered his letters to her.

"You won't drop 'em, Missie, now," he said, "but take 'em straight to mother, eh?"

"Straight to muvver, straight to muvver," warbled the child to a tune of her own, dancing up to the porch, up the stairs, and into a first-floor room. A tall woman sat writing there at the open window, looking up as the little girl entered with a smile of unspeakable tenderness on her marked and weary face.

"Who'll buy my yetters, beautiful yet-

ters, fresh-gavvered yetters?" the child sang, keeping her hands behind her, while the mother, entering into the game with the patient readiness of custom, waited until the imp chose to dole out three or four letters, one by one.

"Zoo doesn't yike zem," she observed gravely, when three had been read and the fourth asked for. "Yike zis one?"

The mother looked out of the window with frowning gravity after reading the fourth letter; read it again and sighed heavily. Then she turned to the child now lying on the carpet playing with the cat.

"Papa is not coming to-day after all, Pansy," she said, with constrained sadness and another heavy sigh.

Pansy smiled happily at this and observed that it was a good thing, because she need not now be good.

"Fie, Pansy! Why do you say that?"

"Me doesn't yike to be good," she explained mournfully. "And me doesn't yike papa," she added, with emphasis.

"You are a very naughty child. Get up and be good directly," the mother said, drawing her to her knee and looking into the pretty pouting face with the great velvety eyes that earned her name. "Papa is very kind and good to you. But for him you would never have been born."

"Me didn't *wan't* him to born me," she pouted.

"Fie, Pansy, fie! All little girls love their father and mother. Why, if you had not been born you wouldn't be alive now. Just think if I had no little Pansy," she added, stroking the soft curls.

"Me doesn't want to be ayive," maintained the rebel.

"Don't you want to play in the garden and dance and sing and eat strawberries——"

"And *keam*——" was the quick interpolation.

"And be loved and see the bright sun and green fields, and hear pretty stories told? But you could not if you had never been born."

The great wondering eyes grew graver and graver as they absorbed the mother's glance and words.

"Wouldn't there be nothing if I wasn't borned?" she asked.

"Nothing for you, darling. Think of that and love papa."

Pansy shook her head slowly from side to side, squeezing up her eyes, into which the curls bobbed as she shook. "Me doesn't *yike* him," she repeated firmly, opening her eyes with a defiant glance.

"Then I shall not like you. He is coming to-morrow morning. And if you are not good to him you shall not come in to dinner or have any strawberries or anything nice."

Pushing the impenitent Pansy away, the lady reread the letter with growing disquiet. Colder and colder were the letters, less and less frequent the visits that Mrs. Harris now received from her husband, whose business kept him chiefly in town, while her own and her daughter's health obliged her to live in

pure country air. She knew that he had long ceased to love her. She was beginning to fear that the solid residuum of friendship so often deposited by the effervescence of passion might vanish with it.

"Dear Belle——" the letter began, but that address was not necessarily loveless, nor was the ending, "Yours, A. H." "So sorry to be unable to run down to-morrow, but hope to arrive at midday on Sunday," was a dash of cold water, while "I have something serious to discuss with you without delay" produced a shiver of apprehension and deepened the care lines in the face.

Arthur had of late been visibly bored by his rare sojournings at the cottage and horribly polite; his icy civilities had cut her like whiplashes. She could better have borne ill-temper, fury, even violence—violence of words, not deeds. He had been absent and dreamy, too much preoccupied for conversation, except at cross-purposes. Worst of all, he now wearied of Pansy, took no interest in her droll sayings, and appeared to be

relieved by her absence. "Sweet Pansy! who could be indifferent to her innocent wiles and baby humours? how could mortal resist her beauty and witchery?" she wondered, looking through tear-dimmed eyes at the little figure flitting about the garden. If Pansy could but know how much depended on Arthur's affection for her, or if the little imp could but give up that disastrous whim of disliking him!

Next day the child was daintily arrayed to meet him, in delicate white embroideries, snowy plumed hat, and crimson sash. She was quite good in church—too well entertained by the music and the sight of so many people to be troublesome. The hot sunshine made her languid and content to dance through the fields without detriment to her toilet when they came out afterward, so that a perfect picture of infantile beauty in fine raiment presented itself to the cold, blue gaze of the tall fair man she called father when he met them at the end of the third field, and a round sedate little face was lifted

for him to kiss, a ceremony performed without emotion on either side.

Some churchgoers witnessed this family scene with edification as they passed by—a respectable British father welcomed home by wife and child in serene, everyday fashion.

"How are you, Belle? Awfully good of you to meet me this hot day."

"How are you, dear Arthur? You will be glad to rest in the cool after all this sun"—the gentleman's hat duly raised, the lady's smile a little strained perhaps, a terrible wistfulness, not evident to passers-by, in her gaze.

"Pity the Harrises are so unsociable," was the comment of one churchgoer. "They would be an acquisition to Forestside. A quiet, well-bred woman. He's something in the city. And yet his face is intellectual. They used to dine at the rectory sometimes when first they came; now they go nowhere."

"He leaves her alone a great deal, my dear. What can she find to do all day with

only that one child? They say she is literary, but she is too well-dressed for that."

"Why, nothing could be quieter or in better taste than her dress."

"But it takes a great deal of time and thought to dress quietly and in good taste. It is a fine art."

"That Harris is a wrong 'un, I suspect. Why has the wife no friends?" was another comment.

The trio went sedately across the fields, Pansy, sobered by midday heat and church somnolence, walking between with a hand in each parent's, like the little maiden in Two Voices, the wife chatting with a cheeriness the husband knew to be spurious and could not respond to, putting the blame of his own gloom upon the weather and the crowded Sunday train, as well as upon pressure of business that had hindered the usual Saturday afternoon holiday.

"This horrid business," said Belle with forced playfulness; "it is a monster that devours more and more of your time."

"Ours is a growing practice as well as an old-established one," he replied. "And my father thinks of retiring, when I shall have a larger share in the partnership, and of course increased responsibility. There will be changes in many ways."

"They will want you to spend more time with them, I fear, then, instead of less, as I had hoped," she said, with a sinking heart.

"Naturally. The marvel is, that I could have got down so often before—and without suspicion," he returned, not looking at her face, which turned gray under his words.

"At all events," she said, as they entered the porch and he sank into a deep wicker chair in the grateful gloom, "it is nice to have you to-day, dear, and we'll make the best of it." She bent as she spoke, and kissed him lightly on the forehead. He took it with passive endurance, almost resentment; the thing seemed to him indelicate. He was convinced that she no longer loved him. She felt the caress herself as a stinging indignity forced upon her by cruel

circumstance. He might at least, in common courtesy, have returned the kiss, she thought. But he was quite certain that a perfunctory caress, much more a hated one, is the greater discourtesy.

"The cottage is charmingly cool," he was pleased to say, with attempted graciousness, and she sighed as she withdrew to remove her churchgoing attire.

Then she played from his favourite composers as he sat in the shaded drawing-room that opened on to the garden and was scented with its pinks and roses. He felt all the pleasantness and peace of these surroundings as he looked out beneath the lowered blinds across flower beds and garden hedge, away over tree-tops and blue bloom of distance, and remembered the ancient sweetness of this quiet, refined home and the welcome refuge it had been to him from the din and turmoil of a busy town life.

"*Tout passe, tout casse, tout lasse,*" he reflected, with genuine regret, observing the graceful figure at the piano, the pure profile

of the face in shadows that hid the care lines and indefinable touches of time.

"No, not that, please!" he exclaimed suddenly and sharply, with a note of pain in his voice, as the skilled touch began a nocturne of Chopin's charged with ethereal passion.

"Not your favourite nocturne? Why—"

"Not to-day," he returned abruptly. "Let us have — ah! — that gavotte of Gluck's," he added in a voice almost tender by comparison.

She wondered who now played the favourite nocturne. He remembered yesterday, when Chopin's music had been part of the business that had kept him from the cottage.

There was no more music that day. She rose and stood by the flower-decked hearth, statuesque in the shadows, her white serge gown falling in firmly outlined folds to her feet, her face stern and sad. He looked straight before him through the window, his feet stretched far in front of him, his hands

in his pockets, his head bent, his face in a frown.

"Is she sufficiently prepared?" he was wondering, wishing the day ended, dreading what was before them, feeling it intolerable.

"Was ever pain like this?" she was asking herself, her mouth rigid, her hands clinched, her glance upon the young man's fair face, till he looked up and caught the agonized expression with a keen heart-pang. "I should have written it," he thought, "and yet—how could I? Things have to be explained. Why, Belle," he added aloud, "what a blaze of flowers you've got this year! You must spend hours over those beds."

"Hours and hours," she replied, with a wan smile. "Such lonely hours," she thought.

The luncheon was taken with spurious gaiety, a presentiment on the woman's part that it would be their last together and attempts on the man's at arranging what he had to say after luncheon making conversa-

tion spasmodic, while Pansy prattled at will unrebuked, and so far unbent as to allow herself afterward to be mounted on Arthur's shoulder and carried through the kitchen garden, across the meadow into the forest, where the silent mossed paths and overarching foliage filtered with sunlight made a refreshing contrast to the full blaze of summer over field and farm beyond.

"What about the organist's appointment?" he asked in the meadow.

"Only given to a regular communicant. They will make no exception in my favour."

"A pity. It would have been a beginning and a nucleus for music lessons and all sorts. The cottage is large enough for boarders, a few delicate children to educate with Pansy, and day pupils would soon gather round."

"But where are my references, my friends, the vouchers to my high principles, and other requisites for training children?" she asked bitterly.

"How about paying guests?"

"That would be more feasible, especially during the summer months. But I am so utterly cut off from every one that you would have to find the guests and the references—and—it would be very awkward, dear Arthur, to say the least. You must not think that I make obstacles," she added, with a piteous catch in her voice. "I am, indeed, most anxious to—to—do something, but it is not easy. I think of Pansy's future and remember that it may be difficult for you to——" a stifled sob stopped her breath.

"It's awfully hard for a woman," Arthur rejoined gloomily.

They had now reached a favourite haunt at a little distance from the meadow, a mossed bank at the foot of a group of tall beeches, backed and surrounded with hornbeam and oak trees and a maze of undergrowth. Before them the woodlands sloped steeply, offering a vista of blue bloom, ending in uplands clothed with cornfield, pasture, and farm, and dotted with trees. A little clearing of mossy grass, full of wood flowers,

bushes, and fallen trunks in the foreground, made a playground for Pansy, who flitted about like a large butterfly or disappeared among the hazels, crooning to herself. Pleasant sylvan sounds and scents were in the shadowy nook, vague murmurs and rustlings and a quiet sense of unseen life filled the sun-checkered air. They had spent many pleasant hours in that sequestered spot, tender and passionate words had been spoken there, never, never to be repeated, so Belle remembered, as she sat in the sweet shadows, a posy of cow wheat and wood betony in her hand, while Arthur smoked and Pansy played.

"You see," he said presently, throwing the cigar end away and taking a less lounging posture on the sylvan seat by her side, "we can never make wrong right, and we have done grievous wrong."

"Dear Arthur, what could we have done?"

"It was hard, we were forced by circumstances, we thought ourselves justified. He was as dead to you——"

"And our solemn vow to each other surely hallowed what was already hallowed by our love."

"So we persuaded ourselves, but it was not——"

"Ah! you never really loved me, Arthur. It was only pity, my need was so desperate, my helplessness so awful."

"It was never truly love on your side, Belle; your need, as you say, was so desperate. A more desolate being than you—alone, defenceless, exposed to that bitter night—was never seen. But I had been attracted by you long before and my feeling was very strong. Such beauty, such misery, such utter need could not but rouse feelings too quickly taken for love——"

"Quickly? Why, it was a year before——"

"What did I feel for you when you lay sick with sorrow and absolutely dependent on me in my rooms, do you suppose? When I laid the poor murdered child at the brute's door? I respected your feelings and was

silent. It was not easy to invent a sudden brother, even when the hair was cropped and male attire provided. And when I was taking you across France and Italy, and when the boy's dress had to be given up, and when I brought you here and Pansy came?"

"Ah! what do I not owe to you? Life and reason, hope and love. Oh, I was grateful; I am grateful. I who came to you mad with misery and insult, beggared of everything, even of my sweet dying Harry, possessed only of bare life and the hope of Pansy. How could I not love you, Arthur?"

"If you would have consented to get him to divorce you——"

"And take Pansy? Never! I had vowed that he should have no more innocents to murder and maltreat."

"The innocents always came before me; I was never first with you. Still, even if you had allowed the divorce, such a marriage would have broken my mother's heart. And if the child——" he paused, Isabel sighed,

both looked toward the unseen churchyard in which lay their three months' babe.

"The child might have softened her heart," Isabel suggested presently.

"Never. My people are stern Puritans. My mother does not, and I hope never will, suspect. My father has heard something and has made conditions with me. I am to reform, to settle down——"

"You are going to marry!" she cried, with sudden, sharp pain.

"What am I to do?" he returned, looking straight before him at the blue distance, across which Pansy's light, white-clad figure waltzed, decked with honeysuckle wreaths. "Of course my people expect it. The third generation, they say, is due. I am over thirty, and of course I cannot blind myself to the fact that—we have done wrong, that—it *must* be given up," he added, with gasping breath, not daring to look at Isabel, who sat by his side, her hands clasped round her knees, her face bent upon them and hidden, while a low, suppressed cry

escaped her and her body shook with her pain.

The hum of many insects, chirp of grasshoppers, soft sighing of the summer breeze in leafy tree tops, Pansy's song and laughter, lowing of cattle in meadows, and Isabel's sobbing breath were the only sounds for some minutes, during which Arthur still stared fixedly at the blue distance and frolicking child, his fine and well-cut features white, his mouth stern, his teeth clinched. The woman bowed in agony by his side, and, striving to conquer it, knew quite well that the death knell of hope had sounded for her in his words, the realization of her worst forebodings. The bitterness of death was in her voice when at last she spoke, raising a haggard face, with drawn and despairing eyes.

"And your promise, your solemn, sacred promise to cleave to me, forsaking all other till death parts us?" she cried. "Oh, we were to be infinitely closer and dearer and truer to each other than the lawfully bound! It was to be a holier, more lasting union than

any. More than father to my sweet one, my poor, worse than orphaned Pansy. The very precariousness was to give us security; the lack of legal bounds, the knowledge that we were at each other's mercy, was to draw us closer, to make us more careful to cherish our feelings, more chivalrous, more reverent of each other, more trustful. Oh, Arthur! Arthur!"

"We were wrong. It was all sophistry," he replied in a steely voice.

"It was love then; it is falsehood now," she cried. "You are tired of us. A younger face has caught your fickle fancy."

His face darkened and his lips tightened; a cold flash came from the blue eyes that, with all their habitual gentleness and kindness, had a steely substratum of chill impenetrability.

"I must beg you to release me from a promise that should never have been made," was his stern rejoinder, in a hard voice that cut deeper and was more humiliating than her husband's blows and abuse had ever been.

"Oh, that you had never left your door that night—that I had died there on the doorstep with my poor baby!" she gasped. "But I was grateful, I am grateful," she added quickly, struggling with the agony that added many apparent years to her thirty-five and ravaged the remains of her beauty, while the pain that Arthur felt refined and spiritualized his features and made him seem even younger and more handsome than ever.

"I was grateful, too; I am grateful and always shall be," he returned in a gentler voice.

"You? You had everything to give; I had nothing to give."

"Nay, you had as much as I, even more, for you had yourself. Believe me, Belle, I am very grateful to you for those years of happiness. I shall never forget what I owe to you. It was unfortunate that we mistook a warm and close and exquisite friendship for a warmer and—purer and higher feeling. The companionship, the exchange of thought

and feeling, the home you gave me—and—Pansy has been a charming possession. But we did wrong, very wrong. I will do what I can for you, but I fear it will be little material aid that I can give. Duty is duty."

"Does *she* know?" cried Isabel with sudden fierceness.

"Heaven forbid! Such knowledge is not for my dar—for a young and stainless—oh, it would break her heart—crush her life!"

Isabel rose, sick with anguish and the madness of jealousy, and moved impatiently away from these stabbing words. She remembered Arthur's first tenderness, his gentleness and chivalry and the peace and exquisite relief of being free from the violence and squalid misery of her desecrated home; very well she remembered the soothing charm of this man's tender deference and protecting care. Into that exquisite peace had come the fascination of his companionship, the unexpected joy of intellectual converse and refined intimacy, the revelation of an

entirely novel type of masculine character in the freshness of youth, and an austere kind of physical beauty. This was followed by a passion of gratitude and the gradual perception of an admiration growing into love on Arthur's side, and evoking such love and devotion on hers as she had never felt for George even in the first fervour of unawakened youth. Arthur was indeed, in comparison with George, Hyperion to a satyr. The struggle with conscience to a woman who had forgotten how to pray, and was cut off from every other tie, was only enough to cast fresh glamour upon the object of her devotion and bind her more firmly to him. A perverted pride made her glory in her defiance of the law for his sake, in his defiance of it for hers. All the misery of her marriage suddenly rolled like a burden from her crushed heart, made it avid of long-denied joy, the long-repressed springs of passion welled abundantly forth at his touch. Not until Arthur's first glow of passion had subsided did she begin to taste of shame. She

drank it now to the bitter dregs of a never-emptied cup.

She turned back to the beech beneath which he sat, trying to subdue the tempest within her, knowing all was lost, yet bitterly conscious that she must propitiate the source of Pansy's bread. But she could not.

"You will go to her with a lie," burst against her will from her quivering lips. "Your marriage will be a lie and a shame and a curse. As you have acted to me, so will she act to you. As you desert me, so will she desert you."

The steel flash again came to his eyes, but he felt that he must bear with her. "It's bad enough and bitter enough as it is," he said; "don't make it worse with hard words, Isabel. We sinned and we suffer. But let us part friends."

"Friends! Traitor, traitor! We sinned? Oh, yes, indeed we sinned both, but only I suffered, only I suffer! I always suffer! I do right and suffer—I do wrong and suffer.

Life has no mercy for me. I have lawful children and they are murdered in my arms. I have unlawful children and they die. A true wife, I was trampled, beaten, scorned, flung away. A true lover, I am deserted, wounded in heart, scorned, flung away. Arthur! oh, Arthur!" A tempest of sobs came to her relief, she sank upon the mossy bank, her face hidden again, her shame eating into her soul, her grief stifling her.

"Dear Isabel, you are indeed most unfortunate," he forced himself to say without apparent anger, irritated though he was by her passion, and almost hating her for her pain. "But try to be reasonable, try to make the best of it. I've been a brute, I know, and I'm sorry, but I can't undo it. Come, let us be friends. This is a wrong that cannot be set right. It's no use to rage against fate. I'll do all I can for you. There's Pansy coming. Don't frighten her."

He caught up the child as she came bounding toward them, full of some wood treasure she had found, and tossed her high

above his head, making her shout with mingled terror and delight; then, glad of the opportunity, bore her from the spot and amused her till Isabel had composed herself, when he returned to the beech and set the child by her side.

"Me yikes him sometimes," Pansy confided to her mother. "But," she added, after a thoughtful pause, with a sudden, defiant gaze, "he didn't born me."

When they reached the cottage gate a few minutes later, Arthur, looking at his watch, discovered that a train was to be caught by a quick walk across the fields, and left them with a hurried "Good-bye, I'll write," before there was time to reply, leaving Isabel standing confounded by the unexpected and unceremonious leave-taking, gazing after the retreating figure with horror-stricken eyes, desolate and deserted, dumb with despair and deaf to Pansy's importunity.

Ariadne might stand by the unpitying sea forever, and forever stretch out her arms to

the vanishing ship, her voice might call across the calling waves forever in her desolation; but Theseus, his face set toward the ship's course, would return no more forever.

Presently the bells began to chime for evensong. She must have been standing by the gate an hour in her dazed, dumb despair, looking into the sunny void of the fields for the tall figure and handsome face she was to see again no more. The bell music fell like a voice from youth upon her suffering heart, evoking bitter-sweet memories and melting the stony horror of pain and shame that possessed her.

As it filled the golden evening with slow melody, visions swept by upon its waves of forgotten Sunday evenings when she had tripped along with her mother to church, a little child, prattling of angels and heaven; a slim girl, dreaming sweet dreams and joining heart and voice in psalm and hymn; a wedded wife, happy and honoured, her husband, still a lover, by her side. Once more that first passion-thrilled "Isabel," in George's

voice, sounded on her ear as on the bitter winter night five years ago. Then suddenly she became aware of George himself, with such vividness as startled her; George as she had seen him years ago, kneeling in Barton Church in a long evening sunbeam; George, no longer cursing and drink-mused, but calm and clear-minded, and praying, praying for her and Pansy. It was as if a hand reached down from a safe, serene shore into the weltering floods of grief and degradation that swept above her and tried to pluck her from destruction.

A hand, warm and living, in reality did touch hers; the little girl, weary of playing alone so long, had come up to the white, statuesque mother, and grasped her hand. Looking down at the warm touch, Isabel met the wistful gaze of the deep, velvety eyes, and in the troubled little face discerned a look of George, whose daughter Pansy proclaimed herself both in colouring and feature. Then she lifted the child in her arms and buried her weeping face in the little in-

nocent breast as she carried her into the cottage.

Meanwhile Arthur, fleeing the cottage as Lot fled Sodom, felt that his troubles were all behind him and the worst moments in his life overlived.

Arrived at his chambers, he sank into a deep chair with a lassitude as of physical exhaustion, and remained immovable for some hours. Recovering from this, he spent the rest of the evening in certain business arrangements and a letter to Isabel, telling her that the cottage was hers for six months longer, till the lease expired, explaining that his marriage settlements were so exacting and the risk of exposure by checks and letters so great, that no future payments would be possible to him, except of a sum of a few hundred pounds, borrowed at high interest and paid in to her account at the local bank at once, with the balance of his own account there, in the name of Arthur Harris, transferred to her, and giving her, should she be in any way pressed for money or in any other

strait, a carefully guarded address, not to be lightly used.

Isabel read it some days later with deeper humiliation and more bitter pain than George's most savage brutalities had ever inflicted on her.

But when he had finished writing it Arthur Hedley was suffused with a virtuous glow. He had recovered his self-esteem. What if in headlong youth he had sinned as so many men sin? He had repented and cast away his sin. He slept like a child that night in the joy of his great relief. But he gave no thought to the unhappy woman who loved him, and whom he had cast once more, as her brutal husband had done, defenceless and bleeding upon the world's mercy.

# CHAPTER V

## THE HARVEST

TEN years had passed since George Arnott's sharp awakening and double loss. People had almost forgotten that he had ever been anything but the most steady and respectable of country practitioners. As a supposed widower he was freely remarried by local gossip, though hazy memories of tragedy, associated with his solitary condition, sometimes woke to die an early death. His practice was a large and growing one, he enjoyed local renown as a remarkably skilful surgeon, and as a physician he was widely sought as a consulting physician in difficult cases. His practice must have been lucrative, yet he did not appear to be wealthy. People sometimes wondered how he spent his money. His stable was well filled, but for

use, not show or pleasure; his household was unaltered; his life simple and frugal, and too busy for any but the simplest recreation.

On a breezy hill a mile from the town a substantial Georgian house, with a walled garden, a paddock, and much pleasure ground, said to have some connection with the Upton Fathers, was used as a boarding house for invalids. It was called Hill House. The superintendent was formally its tenant and master; the assistants, like the patients, were called boarders, but it was really a home for inebriates. There, in his professional capacity, George Arnott spent much time. There, also, Philip Sternroyd was often found.

But even George Arnott sometimes took holiday, notably in this golden autumn time, when a free week in the company of Father Sternroyd stretched pleasantly before him and promised much refreshment to body and mind.

"Let's spend a couple of days at St. Egbert's," said Father Sternroyd in the

course of a debate as to how they could lay out their free week to the best advantage.

"What and where is St. Egbert's?"

"Oh, don't you know it's one of Father Anstey's dodges, connected with the Mission church at Portsmouth—a sort of slum menagerie, a combination of socialism and monkery. He and his curates live in the house, and everybody and anybody may go and live at free quarters with them. There they call no man common or unclean, nor do they call any man master. No one has any property, especially the owner's; all is in common. All feed at one table; no exception. Your only credentials are to be a man; they can't, of course, take in women, but they are trying to begin a small female house next door on the same lines, and to behave with common decency while in the house. If you swear or use foul language you are chucked out at once. Last time I dined there I sat between a bishop and a burglar; the burglar's conversation was most interesting. You couldn't, of course, expect much from a

mere bishop, and he had the sense to know it. A young, first-class man fresh from Oxford was my *vis-à-vis*, on his right a man who had just done time for some sort of turf cheating and for sundry other little frailties, on his left a parson down on his luck and just bankrupt in a knife-grinding venture—we sent round the hat to start him with a fresh machine. There was a belted earl somewhere about, but he called himself Jones or Robinson; and any number of born and bred tramps. That's the kind of show."

"But isn't it a premium on idleness?"

"No; they've a registry business to get work for people, and it is understood that no one stays longer than just to get a rest and look out for work. And some of them pretty badly want a rest and a few free meals. One poor lad burst out crying when a plate of roast mutton was put before him. The smell of it alone made him tipsy, he hadn't seen such a thing for so long. Father Anstey gets them to open their hearts to him, and cheer-

fully consents to be taken in now and again. He says it's in the bill. Most interesting place—Portsmouth. It has a special brand of slum that beats the record."

So George spent his first leisure day at St. Egbert's, going to Father Anstey's beautiful new church, with its mosaics and fresh flowers, elaborate ritual, and free-seated congregation of slum people and reclaimed criminals—a church built by free contributions and maintained chiefly by the voluntary alms of the poor.

In the evening the two friends went to a cheerful dance of slum folk, male and female. Father Anstey was host and a female relative hostess; it was whispered that only regular communicants were invited to these balls, the pride of the Father's heart. The dancing was vigorous but correct, the steps were carefully and conscientiously executed, formalities strictly observed, the enjoyment was undoubted. But in their goings and comings at St. Egbert's by day and by night sadder things were seen and heard, and

George had melancholy opportunities of corroborating Father Sternroyd's tribute to the speciality of that slum's brand.

On the second evening they were sitting at supper in the cheerfully promiscuous manner indicated by Father Sternroyd, when the discordant mingling of hoarse and shrill voices, raucous yells, piercing shrieks, foul language, and trampling feet, that go to make a drunken row, was heard outside St. Egbert's house, increasing in volume and intensity as it surged slowly by and then dying down like a spent fire.

Some one drew aside a blind to see if the police should be called, and, reassured by the gleam of a policeman's helmet, and the quick, steady tramp of an approaching picket, returned to the table without further comment and resumed the dropped thread of conversation. Sounds as of a tipsy soldier protesting against the too-well-known frog's march that the picket was helping him to perform soon followed. Some policemen in charge of an intoxicated sailor were heard moving

off in another direction, not without a baffled attempt at rescue by the crowd, and then St. Egbert's cook entered by the communicating door from the neighbouring house and appeared at the dining-hall door, to ask if a doctor were among the company, as a woman injured in the row had been taken in and was like to die.

George Arnott at once stood up to go. He would have been followed by Sternroyd but that Father Anstey bid the latter remain at table, as it was what he called "his show" this time, the injured woman being his guest for the time.

"A very common incident, probably," George commented, while he followed the good Father through the corridors and up to the locked door of communication, of which he had the pass-key.

"Very common, but we don't often come into the rows. My sister's idea is to watch them, and, when possible, aid the wounded, rather than leave them to the police, who have to be rough sometimes; for women

fight like tigers when they do fight. I'd rather face ten men any day."

They went down to the ground floor of the women's house and were admitted to a bare, whitewashed room adjoining the street door. There, in the glaring gaslight, they saw the form of a woman of the uncertain age of the street haunter, in mean and shabby clothing, all bespattered with mud and blood, stretched senseless upon the linoleum-covered floor, her head supported and slightly shadowed by a black-garbed Sister. The stertorous breathing and heavy odour of spirits in the air made it unnecessary for another Sister, coming in with a bowl of water and towels, to utter the explanatory words, "drunk, of course." A policeman was present; one or two women of the lowest class, St. Egbert's guests, stood by.

"She sells flowers," one of these was saying. "She got a month's hard in the summer."

"There lies your and my sister, Arnott,"

said Father Anstey, unconsciously plagiarizing Gordon. "Badly hurt, I'm afraid."

George had adjusted a gas jet to throw its glare full upon the stained, unconscious face, and was kneeling by the prostrate figure that he was observing with the intent, unimpassioned scrutiny of his profession, when he suddenly started back, quivering, and sprang to his feet.

"There lies my wife, Isabel Arnott," he cried in a clear and very distinct voice; "brought there by my sin."

Silence for some seconds: Father Anstey's face quivered sympathetically; it was a broad, jovial face, and accustomed to mark feeling. The unmoved policeman noted down the name with stolid precision, the women looked at one another. Strong emotions and powerful incidents were too common at St. Egbert's to be overexciting, and these women were tired out. Besides, respectability was one of the few vices foreign to St. Egbert. Very soon, with a deep sigh, almost a groan, George pulled himself

together, knelt again by the unconscious form, and continued his diagnosis: sponging and bandaging, testing the pulse and breath, raising the closed eyelids to examine the pupils of the eyes, and giving directions to the Sister in charge, with the calm and self-possession of professional habit.

"What injuries?" Father Anstey asked presently, in an unsteady voice. He was told that there was concussion of the brain from a heavy blow and several contused wounds, perhaps from a belt, perhaps from a fall against the curbstone.

The thirty-eight years numbered by this poor victim of the sins of others might have been fifty-eight, to judge by the haggard, lined face and "woe-withered gold" of the still abundant but gray and ragged hair. Her tall and well-built figure was gaunt and emaciated; she bore signs that told her husband a tale of famine, want, and hardship of long standing. It was not easy to recognise, in the disguise of her squalid clothing, bleeding face, and wasted body, the beautiful fea-

tures and supple and commanding form of the indignant young mother whom he had turned into the street, with her dying baby, that bitter night ten years ago. He had thrust her out defenceless by night into the open street at the world's mercy. In the open street by night, defenceless, with the marks of the world's mercy upon her, he found her, and recognised the fruit of his own transgression.

In the long hours during which he watched the unconscious face of the woman who had been the wife of his manhood and the dream and glory of his youth he had ample field for speculation on the steps by which she had descended to this hell of misery and degradation. The wounded face, with unseeing eyes and blank features, was like a dreadful, impenetrable mask, behind which lurked untold tragedy and horror. His hair whitened, his features sharpened, his heart withered in the fiery pain as days went by, the soiled and shamed life trembled in the balance, and the lips that could have

revealed so much remained dumb. Sometimes it seemed as if the ghastly, bandaged face on the pillow were a grotesque mockery of the beautiful woman whose love and life had been given to him, so unlike it was in its likeness, so terrible in its suggestion of what it had seen and known since he cast it away. The squalor of rags and dirt having been removed, the tragedy became more apparent. The phantom-like form, stretched motionless as death, or aimlessly, restlessly turning, reproached and accused him as his dead baby had done years ago, and the unmeaning gestures became full of terrible significance to his troubled mind.

"Go away, George. Go away into the fresh air and think of something else before you go mad," Sternroyd, who did not leave him long at this period, said one day, after much attempted consolation and much prayer with and for him.

"I think I *am* mad. I know I shall be if she dies like this," he gasped. "Oh, yes! I know it is just—for *me*, but for her?"

"You shall not go mad, and she will not die like this," Sternroyd replied with the calm certainty that gave him such power. "Have faith. His wrath endureth but the twinkling of an eye. His mercy endureth forever! Think of the strange links of apparent chance and real purpose by which you have been brought together again. Keep sane, dear lad! You can do her no good by staying; she is well cared for. Go and pray with the people in church. Go out and refresh your mind and body. You will be told of the first change."

Parts of the sad story came out in these days: that she had gained a precarious livelihood by selling flowers, and sometimes fruit, about the streets; that she had been drinking at the bar of the house outside which the tipsy brawl took place; that she had been twice in jail, once for some petty larceny when destitute, once for wandering without visible means of subsistence; that she had no home and no friends, but often passed her nights at a common though fairly reputable

lodging house; that she was quiet and well-behaved, very rarely in drink; that she was known as Belle Harris, sometimes "Lady Harris," and was supposed to be a widow. This from the police and the women sheltering at St. Egbert's House. Neither Father Anstey nor his assistants knew her, though they had seen her offering flowers for sale.

"It's jolly easy," the Father remarked upon this, "to slide into the criminal class once you're destitute, especially if you're a woman."

Later George heard the complete outline of that ten years' history: Of her early dependence on the charity of Arthur Hedley, who, during the first prostration of her grief and illness, had sheltered and disguised her as his brother; of her strong motive to live for the unborn child's sake, and her great fear lest that child should fall into its father's hands; of gratitude on one side and pity on the other, growing imperceptibly into love between Isabella and the man who rescued her; of the sad, inevitable sequence of such

a union; of the bitter struggle, after its breaking, to make a living alone, unfriended and burdened with the care and maintenance of a young child; of her applying at last to Hedley for help, and his anger and threat to reveal the child's existence to the father; of the impossibility of applying to her own relatives for the same reason; of the descent from depth to depth in the mad struggle to support self and child, and the child being at last in the shelter of a cottage home, where a small payment was made—for Pansy had, in spite of all, never seen the inside of a workhouse—lastly of the temptation to theft and its detection and punishment. The drink had never been much, but taken as a refuge from despair, and to stay the pangs of hunger, its effect had been the more excessive.

When Isabel at last opened conscious eyes, the pressure being removed from her stricken brain, the first thing they saw was the face of her husband; not the savage, besotted face of later years, dull-eyed, bloated, and abhorred, but one which, in spite of the

added ten years, was as that of the husband of her youth. Yet there was a beauty in this face and a light in the eyes far beyond that of the young George. The countenance was purified and softened by those ten years of fiery sorrow and penitence; spiritual ardour was in the burning gaze, there was more intellect in the always strong brow, more self-control and calm in the square jaw and full but firm mouth, the thinned, grizzled hair suggested refinement rather than age, the spare, strong figure was lithe and active as well as dignified. Something of her own lost beauty had returned to her marble-white face, in the fine lines and sweet expression of youth in which George felt that his lost wife had been given back to him, purified and healed. Isabel smiled up with a child's trustfulness into the deep, sad eyes, and then her pale lips moved.

"George," she said in a faint voice, with a note of glad recognition, "dear George. It was a bad dream," she added later; "but it is gone," and so slept.

But this burdened soul lingered several days yet, to depart in peace at last.

"Dear George, I have sinned and suffered too much," she said on the last day, in reply to passionate avowals of love and remorse and desire that she should live. "I have fallen too far to rise again in this life." And through all his unutterable longing he knew that her words were true.

And when Sternroyd, rising from prayer to close the eyes at the last, said, "Let us give thanks," he gave thanks from his deepest heart.

A few hours later, on that solemn day, Sternroyd led him apart to a room used for private interviews at St. Egbert's. George followed listlessly, so dazed and exhausted by the emotions of the last few hours that he was hardly conscious of what was around him. Sternroyd having brought him in, went out and shut the door.

The room was bare and clean and dim, containing a few chairs and a table. On the wall opposite the door was a large wooden

crucifix, beneath which a slim, pale child of nine or ten, poorly but neatly clad, stood waiting, half forlorn, half defiant, with great dark, wistful eyes, restlessly searching and watching, like a wild, trapped animal's.

George looked with sudden interest at the child and she at him for a few seconds; then her face cleared and she stepped forward with a shy smile and uplifted face and hands. "I'm Pansy," she said in a tremulous, sad little voice that went to his heart and unsealed its deepest fountain of love and tears. Then, with a sob of unspeakable thankfulness, he took the little lonely thing in his arms and kissed and blessed her. And in the deep peace that fell upon him he knew that his penitence was accepted and her pardon sure. So he tasted the sweetness of God's mercy, which is not as the world's mercy.

# SWEET REVENGE*

THOUGH ruined, Carlen Castle sat proudly upon its steep acclivity, its dismantled and crumbling keep on the seaward summit, its fine, towered gateway facing landward with stately defiance, and looking up a long valley between chalk hills. It made a good point of view from Carlen House, a modern white mansion on the opposite hill slope, half hidden by thick beech woods that, screened by each hill from the salt sea winds, climbed both hills, the slopes of which, meeting in a broad V, allowed a glimpse of sea from the level highroad running through the village at the foot of the castled hill.

These ruins were among the show places

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of the country, and the object of many excursions and picnics all the year long; but chiefly in the autumn season, when Carlen folk gathered a double harvest—one from the fields and another from visitors, whose four-horse coaches, wagonettes, and *chars-à-banc* clustered thickly outside the Carlen Arms and the Castle Inn, in company with innumerable bicycles, the riders of which found it easier to climb the precipitous wooded road to the castle gate without wheels. Though of steep ascent it was a fair road, screened by beech and ash, offering lovely prospects, and passing at its termination on arches over a dry moat. A groove for a portcullis showed what once had been, and loopholes in each beautifully rounded turret by the vaulted entrance recalled days when the bows of English yeomen were feared by the world.

Inside the heavy oaken gate spread level greensward, closely shane and shaded by trees; near the gateway stood a stone cottage with mullioned windows, amid much

greenery and bloom in a plot of garden ground. Here lived the old gatekeeper and his wife.

Another garden, free of the shadow of the towers, lay beneath the broken wall opposite the castellan's cottage. It was inclosed by wire fencing, and led to a small modern Tudor house, built into the ruins out of old and weathered stone. Straight down the middle of this garden ran a broad turf walk bordered with old-fashioned flowers—lavender, stocks, and carnations—behind which were espalier fruit trees, making a light fencing for vegetables beyond. The slim figures of two young women, in straw sailor hats, cotton blouses, and dark plain skirts, moved over the sunny turf among the flowers. One girl was sweeping the fine, short grass, newly mown, with a heath broom, the other was tying carnations; their voices sounded high and clear as they moved and talked.

"Gerald has shown me his hand, Margie," said the girl with the broom. "Oh, these men with their transparent schemes!

How they plume themselves on the subtilty of their little wiles and lures!"

"And what *is* his little game?" asked Margie, who was kneeling by the carnations now just bursting into spicy pink and crimson bloom.

"The usual refuge of the destitute, child —to marry money."

"Gerald!" cried Margery. "Why, he's going to marry *me*—at least so people say."

"Not Gerald, goosey. His friend, this precious young Carr, this lovely blend of Apollo and Adonis, with a spice of Bayard thrown in."

"Dear Rosalind, it's no use to fight against Fate and suitors. Marry one and you'll be rid of the rest. Have him."

"To spite the others? No, Margie; my only chance is to disguise myself in poverty, and go a-hunting for a disinterested husband. Have him yourself, and leave Gerald to me. He'd be a world the better for a good heart-break. Gerald couldn't marry me, you see. He thinks cousins' marriages wicked. So

do I—but that's neither here nor there. By the way, when is this charming youth to arrive—to-night or to-morrow?"

"He dines with us to-night, and he couldn't unless he had arrived, could he?"

"No, but his astral body might. I'll be as hideous as I can, at all events—wear that green gown. I wonder what Fraser will do when he finds I have mown and swept his grass."

"He will probably swear."

Presently Rosalind left the inclosed garden and leant on her broom, whistling softly, as if lost in thought, while Margery sat on a bit of broken wall hard by, arranging a bunch of carnations, tying them with a piece of bast that hung round her neck, and singing in a soft undertone. Her skirt was tucked up on one side and soiled with garden mould, her fair hair was ruffled. Rosalind's darker hair had become loosened with exercise, and her fringe pushed off her forehead under her hat—a hat once white, but now browned by sun and rain. Both girls were

looking at the heavy oaken gates fitted in the stone archway and barred and crossed with oaken beams, when the large bell, hanging inside by the lintel, swung to and fro with loud clangour.

"Poor Grannie! She was up all night with the child, and she's sound asleep now. And Elias gone to cut grass——"

"I'll open the gate; Grannie shan't be waked!" cried Margery, springing to her feet, and going with the bast still over her shoulders to the gate. "These 'Arries ring loud enough to wake the dead."

She unhasped and opened a wicket in the gate, disclosing in the shadow of the vaulted gateway two men, one with a cigarette in his mouth.

"Can we see the castle?" he asked in a well-toned voice, removing the cigarette to speak and then replacing it.

"Certainly," she replied. "Step in."

The young man stepped in, followed by another, also young. Margery closed the wicket behind them, and resumed her seat

and her occupation, while the two men stood just inside and looked round them.

In the foreground was Rosalind, leaning pensively on her broom; behind her were the broken walls of graystone, the little modern Tudor house, through an open window of which the remains of a luncheon could be seen, with the distant keep for a background. Full sunshine threw her face into shadow and lit up the faces of the two men.

The first man was tall and dark, with a beautiful, close-shaven face; he wore a soft felt hat with a pinched crown and slightly sweeping brim, the belted tunic called a Norfolk jacket, and knickerbockers of thinner, more clinging stuff than is usual. Slightly and straightly built, and wearing stockings that disclosed the real shape of the leg, instead of exaggerating the thickness characteristic of English limbs, he made a graceful and, by contrast with others, even picturesque figure. His movements were graceful; there was a suggestion of knightly charm in his look and bearing. His friend was of sturdier build,

with gray eyes and light-brown hair; he was an inch or two shorter than his comrade, still not short. He was less picturesquely dressed, brown-faced and bearded.

"Not 'Arries," Rosalind reflected, as she scanned them with a careless glance, her chin resting on the earth-stained hands clasped above her broomstick.

The dark man sent a quick, sweeping glance over the whole picture, scarcely noticing the figure in the foreground, but particularly observing the small house built of old stones.

"Jove! what an owl's nest!" he exclaimed, with a dissatisfied air.

"What would you have?" his friend rereplied. "Romantic old place—fine ruins, surely."

"One doesn't sell one's soul for an owl's nest or a heap of ruins," rejoined the first speaker, whose clear voice was rather high.

"Oh, souls are cheap enough once in the market," the deeper voice replied. "Let's rest and be thankful," he added,

dropping on a garden seat and stretching his legs comfortably in front of him, with his hands in his pockets. "Jolly old place, Carr. Very good specimen of a feudal stronghold. Norman keep well preserved. Carlen House on the hill opposite. Perpendicular chapel yonder," nodding his head slightly to the right, where, opposite the dwelling house, a perfect and richly traceried window in a roofless chancel was partially revealed between some beeches.

Rosalind had moved away when the bell again sounded, and she hastened to the gate to let in a party of ladies, while Margery said that she would go quietly into the cottage and put the kettle on for Grannie's tea, in case she waked and wanted it.

"Dear old Grannie is still asleep; I hope no one will rouse her," she said, coming out of the cottage five minutes later and addressing Rosalind, who was answering questions, and giving the dates and builders of different parts of the castle to the inquisitive men visitors.

"The present owner is not a De Carlen, I think?" the dark man asked, forgetting, despite his knightly appearance, to remove his cigarette while speaking.

To which Rosalind, finding herself unable to understand the query until it had been repeated twice, the last time without the cigarette, at length replied: "No, an Ormonde. The male line has twice been broken. Here lies the last De Carlen"—pointing out a small chantry in the ruined chapel, which was grass-grown and dotted with stone tombs and broken effigies of mailed knights.

"Very good of the owner to open her ruins to the public," Carr said. "It must be a bore to her. This Miss Ormonde courts popularity, eh?"

"Miss Ormonde is not too poor to be popular," was Rosalind's somewhat dark reply.

"Rustic irony," Carr murmured to his friend.

"A plain woman?" he asked of Rosalind.

"Certainly a plain woman."

"And with *such* a temper!" added Margery with emphasis.

"But young, surely young?" he protested, as if her age were a personal injury to him.

"Well, not so young as she was, poor lady!"

"Still, she must be under fifty," added Margery in a deprecating tone.

"Ha! What did I tell you, Brandon? A frumpish, cross old maid. No one ever good enough to marry her, I suppose?" to Rosalind.

"Those who ask heiresses seldom are good enough to marry them."

Carr laughed a joyous, boy's laugh. "Wise women still exist, Brandon," he said, "and witches, too," he added, with a side glance at Margery.

"This little thirteenth-century window is much admired," Rosalind said abruptly, lifting some ivy that concealed it.

"You two are attached to the place?"

asked Brandon, with the respectful air so decidedly absent from his friend's bearing. "Have lived here long? You don't tire of showing it?"

"I am attached to it—like a tree or a serf of oldtime. I never tire of showing it to people who are interested in it," she replied, smiling.

"As for me, I am quite in love with the place," Brandon sighed, with a keen, quick glance at the bright and intelligent face of the guide. "I could be very, very happy in that little house, Carr," he added.

"My good chap, you could be happy anywhere with a pen and a pipe. I'll be bound you're hatching a sonnet this moment —savage because you can't rhyme stone.

"'Would *I* could bone——
The whole of the stone——'"

"And the mistress——?"

"Condone. There's the rub, don't you know. We'll take the sea view and the tilt-yard for granted this broiling day," he added, in an insolent drawl to Rosalind as he turned

back to Brandon, who was choosing some photographs set out on a little table beneath the cottage window. "I can't afford to spoil my complexion or overtire myself to-day. The dragon must be faced this evening and the siege begun at once."

"What if you do spoil your lovely mug? Easily powder for the evening," suggested Brandon, "and put on a fresh pair of stays to support your willowy waist."

"Too much fag, old Timon. 'Oh! for a beaker full of the warm South; full of the true, the blushful Hip——'"

"Or some ginger pop," suggested Margery, laying her slender forefinger on a stone bottle on the table, while Rosalind packed Brandon's views in an envelope and counted out his change.

"With a kiss thrown in?" whispered Carr, as, with a sudden deft movement, he threw his arm round Margery and brought his face close to hers just in time to receive such a well-intentioned, single-hearted box on the ear as made the archway echo, startled

the owls and bats, sent a cloud of pigeons scurrying up on the ruined walls, and convulsed Brandon and Rosalind between laughter and indignation, but did not wake Grannie—or, at least, only enough to season her nap with conscious enjoyment and an agreeable reflection that her work was being admirably done for her.

Margery's pretty, merry face was white and angry as she moved haughtily away. Carr, very red, with three white stripes on his cheek, was the first of the four to recover composure; he moved off with a muttered apology, and a feeble jest about striking arguments, and, seating himself in the shadow of the broken wall, where a room had once been, began to smoke fiercely at a cigar.

"Hard hit for once, my good Wilfrid," Brandon said, joining him after composedly finishing his purchases. "Jolly little girl. Straightforward. No nonsense about her. Hits out as if she meant it——"

"Damn!" was the brief reply.

"Wretch!" Margery sobbed, under the

shadow of a cedar that reached from the ruined upper room whither she had fled to the wall under which the two men were smoking. "Nasty, horrid——"

"Nonsense, child," interrupted Rosalind. "After all, perhaps it served us right for letting them think us——"

"Us, indeed! Nobody kissed you!"

"Or you, either. Come, come," continued Rosalind, drawing her cousin gently along the narrow path on the first story of the ruin to a deep-recessed ogee window in the cool thickness of the wall, where they could sit comfortably. "You had the best of it, Margie. I don't think he'll want any more ginger pop just yet, do you? Oh, hush, look!"

Both peeped through the unglazed window, which was partially hidden by cedar boughs, and saw, immediately beneath them, the subjects of their conversation. Carr, the white marks still on his flushed cheek, had thrown his hat on the turf before him, and was speaking with unusual energy.

"If good looks were virtues, he'd soon deserve Paradise," whispered Rosalind.

"Oh, Miss Dragon! he'd have got no ginger pop from you," murmured Margery, laughing, with the tears still on her peach-like cheeks and in her merry eyes.

"I don't care," Carr was saying emphatically, "I must have her or I shall be stone broke."

"What! Marry a spiteful, frumpish old maid for the sake of an owl's nest and a heap of ruins?" asked Brandon.

"*And* half the county and Heaven knows what besides. It's positively sinful for all that fine property to be thrown away on a woman. It ought not to be allowed in any Christian country."

"Well, but what would stone-broke youths do with no heiresses to marry?"

"Positively sinful," he repeated, with pious energy. "And here am I, with at least two thirds of my rents unpaid, and all kinds of burdens on the estates, and the mater's jointure, and her house, and the girls'

portions, not to speak of their keep, and mortgages here and there and everywhere, and a run of ill-luck at Monte Carlo last March, and losing heavily on Glendower, and that beast Stone letting Young Lochinvar be got at, besides—one must have one's fling now and then; one can't *always* live like an anchorite——"

"Did you ever—" drawled Brandon slowly—"ah—try?"

"I can't understand the principles on which this brute of a world is governed," complained Carr pathetically. "Here is this—damn! what's this creeping inside my collar?" he cried, putting up his hand to feel—"little stones. Here is this—ah!—this —old crone."

"Unmarried woman, positively rolling in riches. Dover says she has a whole coal mine to herself."

"To roll in?"

"And here am I—oh! I'll make the plunge—I'm blest if I won't—though she's as ugly as sin, as old as Methuselah, as stupid

as an owl, as ill-tempered as a sick bear, and as wicked as the devil; I will have her, I say. Confound it," he cried, putting up his hand to his collar again, "what the devil can this be?"

"The family ghost protesting," explained Brandon, with a delighted grin, as his eye followed a thin stream of mortar from inside Carr's collar to its source in a slender hand vanishing inside the window. "But suppose she won't have you? She must be a dab at refusing by this time if she's hard upon fifty."

"She's a *woman*," Sir Wilfrid returned, with a singular smile. "Oh, hang this dust!" he added, shifting his position. "It's all over the place. She should keep it in better repair. She's a woman, Arthur."

"Most heiresses are; still—they *sometimes* refuse."

"They refuse *some* men. My good Brandon, want a woman, and have a woman; that's my experience. *Confound* it all, the whole blessed place is coming down!" he

cried, jumping up under a shower of stone chips and dust, and turning with bepowdered hair to look up at the window, where no living thing could be seen. "Let us cut this. The horses will be at the foot of the hill."

Long, level rays of a setting sun were filling one of a suite of drawing-rooms opening into each other at Carlen House when Rosalind entered it that evening. She looked at the western glory, looked away, and went into another—a south-facing room—where she saw herself in a full-length mirror, with the reddening radiance streaming past and touching her pearl-white satin skirts. 'As ugly as sin, as ill-tempered as a sick bear'—was that it, Margie?"

Margery, very charming in white lace over blue, laughed joyously. The first guest was announced, then another, and another. Two men, whose names did not reach the hostess, were joined and received at the door by Gerald Dover and led up to her.

"At last, Rosalind," her cousin said, pre-

senting him—" here, at last, is my old friend, Sir Wilfrid Carr."

Sir Wilfrid's gaze, which had vainly sought the plain, old-maidish frump he expected, was a little dazzled by the sunset light from the room behind his hostess, who expressed cordial pleasure at making the acquaintance of her cousin's friend, already well known to her by report, in a voice that made him look up in her face with a start and a suppressed ejaculation.

His astonished eyes saw no faded, dowdily dressed lady of an uncertain age, but just a slim, graceful figure in shining satin draperies, with gleaming arms and fair white neck, bemocking the unusually fine pearls upon it. Then he became aware of kind brown eyes, dark hair curling low on a broad, open brow, a firm mouth with little humorous dimples at the corners, and a genial yet rather patronizing air. It was a young, fresh-faced, and attractive woman, whose subtile smile of welcome so strangely perturbed him; and yet this lofty being was like—cold chills ran over

him at the thought—she was *very* like the girl with the broom, the old hat, and the tucked-up skirts and sleeves who showed the ruins. And alas! innocently smiling at her side, in blue and white, was that very pretty, fair-haired girl who had given him such a hearty box on the ear an hour or two since.

"Plain—with such a temper—frumpish—not yet fifty—not too poor to be popular—the dragon to be faced! Good Lord! I've done it this time, and no mistake," he thought, trying to remember how much Miss Ormonde could have overheard. "A nasty trick to play on a man."

For a moment, realizing that the game was lost, he was completely taken aback and utterly routed; but by the time Brandon had been presented to Miss Ormonde and his confused self made known to Miss Margery Staines, he was, as he expressed it, all there again, and so cool and apparently unconscious of what had gone before as almost to persuade Rosalind, when she found herself following her guests in to dinner on this ami-

ably chatting person's arm, that he and the picturesque youth of the cigarette were different people.

Carlen Castle, unlike Sir Wilfrid, was blushing beautifully in the sunset upon the hill, within sight of the windows of the large, cool hall in which they were dining. Mr. Brandon, who had taken Margery in, commented upon its beauty to her.

"Isn't it a dear old owl's nest?" Miss Ormonde struck in, with a sweet smile. "We are awfully fond of our heap of ruins, are we not, Margie?"

"*And* the ghost. I often envy you your family ghost," Margery replied with infantile simplicity. "I never had so much as a grandfather, much less a ghost, to boast of."

"Ah!—do you *like* this hot weather, Miss Ormonde?" the wretched Carr inquired, with tender solicitude.

"Not much; it's so unbecoming. It turns one brown, and—makes one as ugly as sin."

"Really? But sunburn becomes *some* people," he insinuated with great sweetness.

"The sun always turns me red," Margery kindly explained. "Then my head aches, and makes me as stupid as an owl."

"Have you some iced seltzer?" he murmured to a servant at the moment. "Nothing so refreshing as iced seltzer," he unnecessarily informed his hostess.

"Did you ever try ginger pop, Sir Wilfrid? There's nothing so cooling as ginger pop, of a hot afternoon. We have it at the Castle sometimes, Margie and I. Only a penny a bottle. It is gratifying to one's avarice, even though one may not be too poor to be popular."

"Are you much at the Castle, Miss Ormonde?" Brandon inquired, with the pleasant air of one introducing a fresh and charming topic.

"It depends. Sometimes Margie and I go there for luncheon, especially when things go wrong, and it's either too hot or too cold,

and one feels as ill-tempered as—as a sick bear."

"Surely, Miss Ormonde, that can never be," objected the polite Sir Wilfrid.

"Then it's such a soothing, tranquillizing place to dream in, to discuss one's affairs and curse one's luck, and lay schemes in," continued the pitiless Rosalind. "Perhaps you know it, Mr. Brandon?"

"I think I have some vague memories of the place, Miss Ormonde. How good of you to let people see it! I hope your kindness is never abused. No doubt 'Arries often come there."

"Oh, yes; and Reggies and Johnnies, and all sorts and conditions of people. There's an 'Arry season and a Reggie season. We have some lovely specimens there sometimes."

The beautiful and charming Sir Wilfrid, pensively smiling, as one whose mind is absorbed by ethereal subjects, here descended from some summit of lofty speculation, and asked for opinions on Irving's latest Shakespearian impersonation.

"I can't endure Irving in young characters," Rosalind observed; "Hamlet and Romeo make him look as old as Methuselah."

"And Ellen Terry is scarcely so young as she was," Brandon gently hinted.

"Still she must be under fifty," Rosalind as gently corrected. "But what is that to a genius?"

"Do you — ah — do you like Ibsen?" asked the unfortunate Carr, addressing Margery.

"I don't know. I mayn't know without asking my mamma," she replied. "People's mammas don't seem to admire him much."

"It is quite possible to object to problem plays and Ibsenism without being an absolute dragon of propriety," Rosalind corroborated, with severity; "and Miss Staines is still young and tender, like Little Billee. A shipwrecked crew might eat her—she's so good."

"Till I'm roused," corrected Miss Staines; "then I can be as wicked—as the devil."

"That you can, and hit as hard," Sir Wilfrid was heard acidly murmuring between his teeth, as Rosalind rather suddenly rose, and he went to open the door for the ladies.

"What the deuce is the matter with those two girls to-night?" Gerald Dover wondered to himself when they were gone. "Carr hasn't made any running as yet. I doubt if he ever will."

"My dearest Margery," said the vicar's wife on reaching the drawing-room, "I am grieved to hear you allowing yourself the sad license of speech characteristic of too many young women of the present day."

"It *was* horrid of me, wasn't it?" she smiled back with infantile cheerfulness and candour. "But it was only quotations, after all."

"Not from Ibsen, I earnestly trust."

"Oh, no, not from Ibsen! It didn't sound Ibscene, now, did it?"

"I am happily unacquainted with these new writers, my dear, so I can not tell."

"But why," asked Brandon of Rosalind

later in the evening—"why did you tell us you were ugly? Were you never taught that it is wrong to tell stories?"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Brandon. I said I was a plain woman, and so I am—both in speech and action."

"Well, but Miss Staines declared that your temper was something awful."

"'*Such* a temper,' she said. She meant such a delightfully sweet temper. But I can't answer for it myself. It was kind of Margie."

They were having coffee in the open air on a terrace, whence the Castle, all silver-steeped in moonlight, and a peep of sea between two hill slopes, could be seen. Cockchafers were still droning in the almond-scented clematis, a little warm breeze stirred the beech tops, yellow corn stood in aisle on a slope above the peaceful village, where little orange dots suggested homesteads; the tree-shadowed lawns and dim, dreaming flowers looked magical and unreal in the silvery light.

Arthur Brandon's thoughts ran into involuntary rhyme; he had never been so happy in his life. Yet he wished the never-before-coveted burden of riches was his; still more he wished Rosalind Ormonde poor. Wilfrid Carr and some other vandals were spoiling the dewy flower scents with cigars, Wilfrid wondering how he was to go through the promised week at Dover's seaside cottage and continual meetings with the Carlen people after this unlucky *fiasco*. "And to crown all," he reflected, "I must needs try to kiss the wrong girl. How like my luck!"

Still even Carr was happier than he deserved to be; the dust and stones that incommoded him in the afternoon now strewed the carpet of his dressing room; he had a sort of vague idea that the best thing would be to sit on that terrace forever and watch that tiny ship sailing far and far away on the moonlit sea, and the proud Castle dreaming in mystic light of its vanished glories, and the village nestling in foliage by the church tower at the foot of the steep.

But Brandon, the briefless, the impecunious, the blessed, saw all these things with equal joy—and he saw more: he saw a shadowy company of plumed knights ride with faint, far-off clang over the drawbridge, saw the moon rays glitter on the breastplates of men at arms; saw banners flutter lightly as the gray moths on the terrace, and fair ladies leaning from battlements to wave the knights Godspeed. All this fancy showed him, though ladies fair as any of old moved actually in white, shining raiment among the flower scents on the terrace, their voices sounding with the charm of open air and stillness, their eyes softer than silvery stars in the pale moonlit sky. Had not minstrels of old dared to pay homage of song to lovely *châtelaines*? But how should a minstrel in a dress suit and hideous white breastplate—Just then this modern *châtelaine*, her pearls half muffled in a silky wrap, happened to turn and meet the full and ardent gaze of the silent minstrel's eye, so that for one beatific moment two young hearts throbbed together.

Costume changes, custom alters: old castles and old codes and creeds crumble to ruin; but youth and joy, love, innocence, and song, are the same throughout all ages forever.

A few days later Wilfrid Carr found himself waiting with a beating heart in the library of Carlen House, whither he had been summoned by its mistress for a private conference. "What could she want with him?" he asked himself as he stood by the open window and looked at the towered gateway, shadowed now, with the morning light behind it, and the cornfields and sea robbed of their moonlight glamour. He had not long to wait; the plain woman quickly entered, and plunged at once into the topic in hand.

"Sir Wilfrid," she said gently, "I am told that your affairs are greatly embarrassed. Pray do not think me obtrusive in asking if such is really the case."

Such, he replied, certainly was the case; it was too kind of Miss Ormonde to be interested in the matter. It would soon be no

secret, since his name was about to appear in the Gazette.

"Well, now," Miss Ormonde continued, with a genuine, delightful, old-fashioned blush and an agreeable hesitation in her speech—"could not means be found—ah—to be able—ah—ah—be permitted—to help to some slight extent—to pay off—that is to say, to avoid liquidation——"

Sir Wilfrid turned pale. He was standing; he placed both hands on the top of a chair to steady himself. "Good Lord! she's going to propose," he thought, "and I shall *have* to have her."

He said something unintelligible in reply, but as she was not listening, and he had not the least notion of what he was saying, it was of no consequence.

"Would"—she faltered, with deepening blushes and a husky voice—"would fifteen thousand pounds be of any use in this matter?"

"Wouldn't it!" he exclaimed, catching his breath and standing erect. "It would

just trim the boat; that and emptying the stables, and so on. But," he added, with his sunny smile and easy relapse into banality—" but fifteen thousand pounds, Miss Ormonde, are not so easily obtained as you seem to imagine. Fifteen thousand dewdrops were on the grass this morning, but where was the fairy to turn them to golden sovereigns? "

" Not as far off, perhaps, as *you* seem to imagine," was the tremulous rejoinder.

" In for it now," thought the distressed baronet, hardening his heart for a desperate leap, as when, in the midst of a full burst with the hounds, a bullfinch, a stone wall, or double-ditched fence suddenly appears. " I was never yet proposed to. I don't know the ropes. But I suppose I must go for it for all I'm worth. I haven't the cheek—no; I can't *ask*, after this. There are some things you *can't* do."

Raising his lustrous and bashfully drooped eyes to the lady's gaze, he was surprised, even confused, to see that hers were

moist with feeling. Something rose in his throat, his face crimsoned. "Beast as I am, I'd rather she hated me," he thought, quite unable to speak.

"Not far off at all," she added, in a low, melodious voice. "You have, Sir Wilfrid, where you probably do not suspect it, a sincere friend and wellwisher, disposed to play the part of a benevolent fairy to you. This person, who wishes to remain unnamed, thinks to discern through all your weaknesses, follies, and selfishness——"

—"Weaknesses—follies?" he thought. "Ladies have yet to acquire the essentially masculine art of proposing. But Rome wasn't built in a day. *We've* been practising since the world began—"

—"some substratum of manhood and worth which may with time and care be developed. It is thought that a fresh start, with good resolutions, might—almost—make a man of you."

"I'm infinitely obliged to the fairy who thinks so highly of me," he replied, savagely.

"Fairies, however beneficent, always took it out of you in some form or other, if I remember rightly."

"Let us hope you will justify this person's good opinion," Rosalind added, with momentary gravity, "for the person to whom I allude means well by you and has the means of expressing good will in a material form."

"Does the—ah—fairy—ah—propose, that is—intend—ah—that is to say, mean—in other words—if I asked her to—to marry me——"

"Her?—marry *you*? Really, Sir Wilfrid, you have a pretty talent—for a mere man—for jumping at conclusions. Marry you, indeed! Fairies don't marry mortals, especially when they disapprove of them. Besides, you don't know but she may be a man—a fairy godfather."

"Oh!" returned Sir Wilfrid, crestfallen but relieved, "I—I—didn't know she was a man. I thought they were always *godmothers*. All kindness seems to be feminine."

"The greatest mistake," she retorted sharply. "Kindness is essentially masculine. This person," she added, becoming meek and embarrassed again, "has sent you this" —handing him a goodly roll of banknotes— "the amount you mentioned. Please—oh, do please—take it!"

But he stood silent, motionless and pale, with quivering lips and brimming eyes. After all, Rosalind reflected, he was a remarkably handsome fellow; and is not the beautiful the good, and the good the beautiful?

"But not to Monte Carlo," she added, with a little tremulous laugh, as with some broken words he took it.

"No, not there," he faltered.

"No soul on earth will know. No—no interest, no acknowledgment. And," she added, after a little pause, "*don't* pay court to my Margie unless you *really* love her."

"Ah! but I do—I do from the very bottom of my heart," he protested, with genuine feeling.

"He's going to reform and live on penny buns and ginger pop ever after," Rosalind told Margie that evening, "and I think—a kiss might very well be thrown in."

"I don't think," sighed Margery, "I ought to have hit him *quite* so hard."

"Oh, the harder the better. It was the best stroke of luck he ever had in his life—or I either."

"*You,* Rosalind? But you are not——"

"Going to marry Wilfrid Carr, as I might have done else. Unparalleled luck there. And I am going to——"

"Accept Mr. Brandon?"

"Nonsense, child, never jump to conclusions. But stranger things have occurred. And I have had my revenge upon Sir Wilfrid, the wretch!"

Margery threw her arms round her cousin's neck and kissed her. "Revenge is sweet," she said.

# AN OLD SONG*

## CHAPTER I

THE night was stormy; a wan moon rode through masses of swift-sailing black and gold cloud, through lakes of clear blue space and film of opal and silver, thus producing a wildly beautiful and impressive series of sky pictures. Now and again the dim, wet streets were swept empty and dark by a scud of rain, then as suddenly flooded by clear, pale moonlight, when the wet flags and streaming runnels became a dazzling silver brilliance, making the light from houses and shops appear duller and dimmer than before.

Few people were abroad, so that the lingering steps of a man wrapped in an Inver-

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ness cape made echoes to accentuate the silence otherwise broken by a shout, a tipsy song, a hoarse altercation from a public house, or the inarticulate yell of a wet and shivering newspaper imp. Nothing escaped this man's observation; names over shops, public-house signs, chapels, private houses, all appeared to interest him; while the splendid pageant of the moving tempestuous sky scarcely drew a glance from his piercing eyes.

A dull gleam from the Post-Office attracted his gaze, and drew from him an expression of disfavour, shared by the brand-new, red-brick Corn Exchange, in the depreciating monosyllable "new." Something appeared to be wrong with the face of the church tower, shining out suddenly in the unclouded moonlight, something amiss with the Town Hall, whence a lighted clock looked dimly down on moon-silvered mud, and on the shining wet capes of two policemen whose wistful gaze was on the glowing window of a neighbouring bar.

The clock struck on a deep bell; the

quarter chimes of another rose, silenced it, and declined in easy modulations, tossed and separated by wind gusts, to the hour bell, which tolled nine to the accompaniment of various little sharp, self-asserting chiming and striking timepieces.

"Flat," muttered the solitary stroller, pausing in a sheltered corner to light a pipe, but baffled by damp gusts of wind that shrieked and wailed as they tore fitfully down alleys and round corners and gulleys made by chimney and gable. Then he sauntered on without a pipe and buffeted. The moon rushed into a black mass of silver-edged cloud; the darkened street was deluged by a rush of rain. Holding his soft-brimmed hat on, he quickened his pace in the face of wind and rain, and, as one who treads an accustomed path, turned a corner and came in front of a large building, shapeless and dim in the darkness, but emitting golden light from its high windows and open two-leaved door, whence also issued clear notes of a piano.

Giving himself a dog-like shake, he

stepped into the hall, took off his hat, shook the rain from it, put it on again, and turned up the lighted corridor to a small table, at which a man sat taking money.

"What is it?" the newcomer asked in a deep, mellow voice.

"Shilling—after nine," the money-taker replied, looking up into a lined face, bearded thickly, shadowed by the broad-leaved hat, and illumined by piercing eyes, in which lurked a humorous twinkle. The money-taker at once associated the questioner with music, he could not explain to himself why, and yet he told himself there was a suspicion of gentry about the man.

"What is on? Not how much," the man in the Inverness corrected. "It is Josiah Whitewood," he added to himself. "Not a day older or more civil."

"Concert," growled Josiah. "Anybody with ears might know that."

But the deluge of rain crashing on the roofs in ever-growing violence was enough to drown louder and less delicate music than

that issuing brokenly from the hall; the storm seemed to have gathered itself for a final burst, after which it died down as suddenly as it had begun, in little melodious trickles and drips, just as the stranger entered the spacious, brilliantly lighted room, through which rang the pure notes of a soprano, singing, "Bid me discourse."

The melody flooded the wide, high hall, a numerous audience sat hushed and attentive, gazing at the singer, upon whom the light was concentrated, and whose figure, in its white and shining satin gown, bordered and garnished with gold, rising above the palms and hothouse plants on the stage, seemed to be the source of all the light as well as of all clear and lustrous melody that filled the building.

"I will enchant thine ear,
Or, like a fairy,
Dance upon the green."

To one coming out of storm, darkness, and chill wet into the brilliance, warmth, and music, and seeing the beauty of young faces, with fragrant hair, rose-wreathed, the

flash of jewels and gleam of gauzy silks, the contrast was striking; but to this solitary, storm-driven wanderer, it was something more. A wave of emotion gathered up as if out of the deep heart of some tempestuous sea, rushed over his strong face, sending a faint quiver through his tall frame. Pushing his hat farther over his forehead, he leant against a pillar, like one staggered and breathless from a blow. He closed his eyes and shut out the bright building, the sea of heads, and the graceful figure in shining satin, holding her song in both hands before her, and swaying slightly to bring out the fuller notes.

"Or, like a nymph,
With bright and flowing hair,"

she sang. Her throat was full and firmly set; one could see the song throbbing in it as in a bird's, at its spring a jewel quivered in light that seemed alive. She brought out the golden, gurgling triplets of the fairy dance without any facial distortion, her slightly flushed, unpainted, and unpowdered face wore the rapt, happy expression of con-

scious artistic power; it was as full of music as her voice. Her eyes, when raised from the sheet of music, had a level gaze that saw—not the sea of faces in brilliant light, but the nymph with bright, flowing hair, the fairy, the dance, the enchantment, the unbodied things music summons up.

When the spell broke, as the song ended, there was a roar of applause from every part of the hall; the artist smiled gravely, bowed, retired a little way, and advanced at the deepening applause to bow once more, and again retire, handed back by the accompanist, a tall, handsome man. Having reached the back, amid the rising surge of a thunderous recall, she spoke to the pianist, who led her to the front, where she stood, tranquil and self-contained, but evidently pleased, while the loud, excited plaudits gradually rolled back into stillness like a fallen wave.

The man in the Inverness was, perhaps, alone in giving no applause to the song, every note of which his still, never-wavering attitude and fixed gaze seemed to have ab-

sorbed. When it was done he raised a binocular to his eyes and looked through it so fixedly that, with the glasses and the picturesque hat and cloak, he seemed like the carven image of a man, silent, motionless, through all the tumult of the recall. The singer, without notes this time, and lightly holding one end of her long fan in each hand, looked over the mass of uplifted faces with a new expression; it was as if she loved each face she looked on.

"Isn't she a *dear*?" murmured a young woman in front of the stranger to her sweetheart, who promptly whispered back, "There's only one dear for me."

The singer softly sang in pure, round notes, neutral, till the name evoked a caressing tone that rose to passion in the last line:

"What's this dull town to me,
Robin Adair?
What was 't I wished to see,
What wished to hear?
Where's all the joy and mirth,
Made this town a heaven on earth?
Oh! they are all fled with thee,
Robin Adair!"

The first notes struck the stranger like a strong sea wave, his hand, with the glasses, fell and hung at his side, tears scalded his eyes, unregarded by himself, unnoticed by them. No doubt he had heard Robin Adair often enough before. Who has not? Perhaps he thought of some occasion on which he had heard and loved it. There is no song more tender, with a pathos more artless, than this old, ever new favourite, as natural and unpremeditated as the redbreast's own. But not every singer can bring out the tenderness and heartbreak as did this lady.

"What made the ball so fine,
Robin Adair?
What made th' Assembly shine,
Robin Adair?"

was sung with gentle wistfulness, "as when a soul laments that hath been blessed with sweetness in the past."

"What, when the play was o'er,
What made my heart so sore?
Oh! it was parting with
Robin Adair!"

rose to passion.

People shed tears unawares; the sweethearts in front of the man in the Inverness pressed closer together, unabashed, in the crowd.

The soft, sad reproach,

> "But now thou'rt cold to me,
> Robin Adair!"

was delivered with rare delicacy, and

> "Yet him I loved so well
> Still in my heart shall dwell;
> Oh! I can ne'er forget
> Robin Adair!"

became an agony of tenderness that brought a quiver to the singer's lips, and compelled the homage of a momentary silence, broken by a less noisy but more profound applause. For some seconds the man in the Inverness remained motionless by his pillar, with wet eyes; then he looked at the stage, with its swaying back scene of marble and pillared portico, between which gleamed a blue sea with a ship in the offing and a skiff moored by the steps, with its bower of palms and pot plants, its open-winged piano and its music stands. All was in bright light, but

empty and deserted; a hard desolation seemed to reign there in the absence of the graceful figure in shining draperies.

It was no dream; all was real, especially the scene painter's marble portico and sea—very real; but yet, through the comparative silence, scarcely interrupted by subdued hum of voices, rustle of draperies, sound of footsteps and pushed-back chairs, rang out the pure golden notes of the beautiful, impassioned voice,

"Oh! I can ne'er forget
Robin Adair!"

All true and real.

He beckoned to a boy with programmes and took one, keeping his place while people surged round him, going in and out, seeking friends and chatting.

"Miss Ruby Elliott, soprano," he read. Every one had heard of, if not actually heard, Miss Ruby Elliott; yet this man with music in his face seemed new to the spell of her singing. "*Miss*," he pondered. Singers do not readily part with a name that has won

recognition. That handsome pianist might be her husband. "Mr. Ralph Somers" was a known but not a first-class name.

The concert was in aid of local charities, patronized by a long list of town and county worthies. Among these occurred a name that was as steel to the stone of the man's face which flashed fire:

THE REV. DR. ASHWORTH, Vicar of ——

Taking his opera glasses again, he raked the dress circle. In front, quite near the stage, stood a white-headed clergyman, grave, dignified, even stern. He turned at the moment, his profile traced sharp and clear on the crimson draperies below the stage; he seemed to be speaking to a lady near him.

At the sight of the old clergyman the stranger quivered again, the glasses once more dropped by his side, to be again raised and intently gazed through. A light treble laugh rose from behind the scenes, accompanied by a cheerful pop, an opening door let out confused murmur of voices, clinking of

glass and china, and sudden chime of chorused laughter, dulled by the closing of the door. The sweethearts were absorbed in each other; the young carpenter, square, ruddy, and clean, gazed upon the homely face of the girl beside him with a sort of sacred rapture. Their words floated up to the man standing behind them.

"Isn't Miss Elliott beautiful?" the girl whispered.

"Beautiful? H'm! Easy to look beautiful in white satin, and gold and jools, Fanny. The beauty for me is when anybody looks pretty first thing in the morning, in a print gown tucked up, and bare arms, sweeping out of a front door. Ah, my dear! and looking out for *somebody* as comes round the corner and gives her——"

"Go on, you great stupid! And nice and silly we looked, with the baker's boy bringing the rolls and grinning!"

"I'll grin him next time I catch him! Fine feathers make fine birds, Fan. Miss Ruby Elliott can't be so young as she looks."

"She was a woman grown when mother lived parlour maid at the vicarage, George."

"Before you were born. She've kept well. Singing is like salt, Fan. She lived with Dr. Ashworth, didn't she?"

"No, she lived long with her uncle, old Mr. Forde, the lawyer. Her real name's Forde — Beatrice Forde. Ruby Elliott's only her singing name. Mother's heard her sing many a time at Dr. Ashworth's. There was a pupil there used to make up to her. Him over there by Dr. Ashworth."

"Mr. Vereker, that old parson?"

"He wasn't much of a parson then, mother says. Always up to something, him and young Mr. Ashworth together. That's Mrs. and Miss Vereker alongside of him. Mother couldn't a-bear him. Poor Mr. Robin was different; no harm in him. Isn't Miss Vereker pretty?"

"Not my style, Fan. What would she be in a cap and apron?"

A fresh burst of applause surged up; people had rustled back to their places, the glee

singers were forming on the stage, the star among them. The programme showed the chief burden of the evening to be sustained by her.

"She does it all for love," Fanny explained to her carpenter, "and for the sake of old times."

The tenor was local. He cracked on the high notes, and went flat at the end of the evening; the contralto was amateur, with a noble, untrained voice; the glee singers were amateur. The 'cello player was *welt-berühmt*, German, and unpronounceable. The audience scarcely knew that in the stringed quartette his instrument had the chief part, much less that few but he could so render it.

As for his obligato to Miss Ruby Elliott's Batti, Batti, they scarcely heard it; yet it was like the flow of a deep, calm river, down which the fine soprano voice floated with steady ease, like a full-sailed ship.

The solitary man below the gallery, absorbed though he was in the sunny splendour of the melody, involuntarily made the

motions of one playing the 'cello accompaniment. But even he was less moved by that great and difficult melody, excellently sung and excellently accompanied, than by the simple and touching beauty of Robin Adair, or the pure tunefulness of Those Evening Bells, sung as an encore, which made people's eyes wet again. For the audience knew the singer was thinking of their own church bells, which she and they had heard in their youth on sunny summer evenings in the fields near their own little town.

The numerous recalls and the hearty, indiscriminate applause made it late before the programme was finished; people were impatient for carriages and wraps. There was a small crush, through which the young carpenter gallantly and quickly piloted Fanny, and the man in the Inverness more quickly slipped himself, reaching the carriage entrance in time to hear the first name called, and so placing himself in heavy shadow as to see every face in the full gaslight reaching to the curbstone.

"It is curious," the tenor, standing near the door within, was saying, "her voice came to her all at once. She sang at a Penny Reading here one Christmas. None of us thought much of it; nice, fresh, fluty notes, but she couldn't get at them, and no expression. Then, soon after New Year, she sang at a village concert near here and electrified us all. You wouldn't have thought it was the same voice. People said it was trouble brought out her voice. I've heard of song birds blinded to make them sing. She left the place soon after."

Carriages rolled up, filled, and rolled away. The man in the cape stood in the shadow, where he could hear what the tenor said, and waited patiently.

"Dr. Ashworth's carriage!" he heard called. The old vicar stepped out of the hall and handed a middle-aged lady and a young girl into a venerable vehicle driven by a man out of livery.

"Dr. Westland's carriage!" was the next. The stranger, deeply interested in the

preceding carriage, glanced but carelessly at this, which took up two ladies, a gentleman, and a little girl, until one of the ladies, closely muffled round the face, and gathering white satin skirts about her, turned her head, bowed to some one within the building behind her, and said "Good-night" in a clear and rather high voice.

At this the stranger quickly advanced, opened the carriage door, and held it, while the ladies and the child stepped in, so that their skirts brushed him and he felt the softness of satin on his ungloved hand. They did not observe him, but he watched the carriage roll out of sight so intently, and with such forgetfulness, that a policeman ordered him to move on. He moved on, asking the next policeman he met the way to Dr. Westland's house, whither he betook himself, and which he examined with much interest, slowly pacing the wet pavement opposite and thinking of many things.

Were those things sorrowful or joyful, sweet or bitter?

Oh, rosemary, rosemary, bitter-sweet, wholesome herb, you always bring tears, not idle, but "from the depths of some divine despair," whether recalling bliss or woe, sunshine or tempest! Your fragrance is the scent of unforgotten youth, which was sweet and is bitter in retrospect; which was fresher than May dew and is now old as a mossed, illegible tombstone; which was sad and is now sweet as pressed rose leaves; which was gloomy with despair, and is now, seen in the hot meridian of life, glorious with auroral hues of hope. Grow not in my garden, tear-watered, melancholy herb; rather let some tributary of Lethe flow stilly round its flower plots, some dreaming lotus plant float on its fountain's brim! I cannot tell what the magic herb brought to the lonely man's mind; it breaks my heart only to think of him, pacing the wet flags in darkness, in sight of the lighted house, not quite alone, since he was face to face with his past.

## CHAPTER II

"WELL, now," Dr. Westland was saying in the warm, bright house, "singing is good for lungs, and digestion, too. So, my dear Ruby, you are expected to be hungry."

"I am hungry, Arthur, but I would rather not *begin* with a whole partridge, thank you. Oh, no! it isn't so very good of me to sing so much and take so many encores. I delight in singing here—at home—and I delight in the applause, desperately unjust applause, I know. I was really vexed that Von Strümpschen was so absolutely ignored."

"Oh! old Von Strümpschen wouldn't care for such an audience."

"Wouldn't he? Nobody cares to play to a stolid audience. It is very cramping."

There was a preoccupied expression on

Ruby's face. Her hearing was acute, even morbidly so. It seemed to her that slow, solitary footsteps on the pavement kept time to their desultory chat.

"Well, dear, your reception agreed with you. I never heard you sing better than to-night," Mrs. Westland struck in.

"Gratified vanity, Emmy," Westland explained. "You certainly were in first-rate form, Ruby."

"It was not vanity; it was affection and 'auld lang syne,' and all sorts of fine feelings that nobody in this house gives me credit for. And yet," she added, after a pause and a long sigh, "it was very sad."

"Sad? Why?"

"Rosemary, for remembrance, and that's sadness. Everything to-night called back old times."

"That tenor's singing of 'Ruby,' for instance," said Mrs. Westland acidly.

"Oh, Ruby, my darling! the small white hand
That gathered the harebell was never my own,"

she sang with exaggeration and gesture, while her husband coloured darkly and burst into an awkward laugh.

"I wasn't the only one who used to sing it, Em," he apologized.

"Dear me, Arthur, you don't mean to say that *you* ever sang that wonderful song?" his wife returned, with a face of innocent wonder. "I was very young at the time, dear; I was told that Ruby got the name from the ditty sung by her numerous swains."

"Yet I was not consumptive, and I certainly didn't die. I think I took the pet name myself as a child," the singer explained, with a faint flush. "How that horrid Jim Vereker used to mouth the song at me!"

"But you did read Tasso, and gather harebells, and *had* a small white hand," Westland added, glancing at that resting on the shoulder of his little daughter, who had begged to sit up to supper, and had fallen asleep, nestled to Cousin Beatrice's side.

"Upon my word!" began Mrs. Westland.

"All this was before you were born or thought of, my dear," her husband explained. "Ruby was an awful flirt in those days; who knows how many a poor fellow may have gone wrong through her?"

"Not that Vereker, certainly. He must have been born wrong. Perhaps I turned him comparatively right—who knows? He's a *canon* now," Ruby added, with a singular smile.

"His poor wife!" Mrs. Westland and Beatrice ejaculated simultaneously; a simple phrase, but impressive.

"Oh, come! poor old Vereker is all right now," Westland interposed, "and he was never as bad as *all that*. Strange to see him there to-night, looking as respectable as an owl, with young Thacker howling 'Ruby' half a tone flat."

"As that Vereker *always* did," interjected Ruby.

"His girl is growing into a nice little thing. Well, there was one swain who sang 'Ruby' in tune—poor Bob Ashworth."

A faint, very faint tremor passed over the singer's face; she looked steadily into a bowl of chrysanthemums before her. "Yes," she assented, "his voice and ear were both true."

"Poor chap! We were awfully sorry for him. I never could understand how he came to do for himself to that extent."

"Oh, it was all that Vereker! The other was only a scapegoat," Beatrice cried in a half-stifled voice.

"How like a woman to be so unjust! It wasn't *all* Vereker, Ruby. It was just this: Vereker was older. He had a knack of never being found out. He'd been through a public school and Robin had never stirred from the vicarage. Vereker led Ashworth, one of the most unlucky fellows upon the earth, into scrapes——"

"And sneaked out himself and left Robin to take the consequences," Ruby added. "Robin was loyal and guileless; Vereker a liar and a sneak. One was a man of honour and a gentleman, the other a coward and a cur."

"And a canon," Westland added softly, with an affectionate smile. "Ah, Ruby! what should we poor men do if women didn't side with the weak and unlucky?"

"What *did* Bob Ashworth do?" Mrs. Westland asked. "I have a dim remembrance of something whispered about and we children being told not to ask questions."

"Oh, that's an old scandal," her husband replied. "I was not at home at the time. I was at Guy's. I went up that October. I'd been reading with old Ashworth."

"Oh," said Beatrice, "it was a sad, sad story! He was tempted and—trapped. His father was so injudicious and so harsh. Fancy allowing a man, a grown man, no pocket money! It was intolerable. Poor old man! He suffered sadly—yet justly. But oh! it was bitter—bitter for the son!" The voice failed—there came a long, long sigh.

"It *was* intolerable," Westland assented in the same gentle tone, with the same half-

reverent, half-compassionate glance he had bent upon the singer's moved, sweet face, on which years had written nothing that was not noble. "Old Ashworth never realized that Robin was anything but a child. Clarence went to Marlborough and Sandhurst, Wilfrid to Winchester and Oxford; but when Robin left the grammar school he was kept at home with his father's pupils—forgotten, as it were."

"His father wished him to be a clergyman," Beatrice added.

"So he articled him to a solicitor. 'Promise to be a parson, and you go to Oxford,' was the old man's catchword. 'Not I,' was Robin's. I fancy that was the staple of their conversation for years. Then the doctor used to pray at him in family prayers, and make him go to missionary meetings and perpetual Sunday schools. As for old Aunt Berry, she was a poor substitute for a mother; every peccadillo of Robin's was exaggerated and carried to his father, instead of being smoothed over and hidden. Vereker

used to talk to the doctor about his soul, and whatever devilry he was about in the week he always turned up in a top hat at church on Sunday. Robin would refuse to discuss his soul; he said it was indelicate. He often missed church and never remembered the sermon. Vereker was free, providing he came in at eleven at night, and spent his time as he pleased. Robin, going daily to work at Jackson Forde's office, was treated as a schoolboy. He and Vereker used to play billiards at the Red Dragon, but Ashworth went against his father's will, and with no money. Only one thing could come of this."

"Uncle Jackson used to think the father and son actually hated each other," Beatrice said.

"But Robin was in reality the favourite son; his mother died at his birth. Wilfrid and Clarence did as others did—they were not saints. Their bringing-up was considered a failure. Robin was to be perfect. Everybody liked Bob Ashworth. Not even his grim father could quench his high spirits,

though his jokes were not always original or witty. Oh, Ruby! do you remember the black bishop?"

"I never quite got at the rights of it. Some harmless joke, wasn't it?"

"Let us hear about the black bishop," Mrs. Westland said. "You can smoke if you like, Arthur."

## CHAPTER III

"It was when Vereker first came, and about a year before Ashworth was articled to your uncle," Westland began, when he had set his cigar going. "I wasn't in it. A real nigger bishop was to stay at the vicarage and carry on a regular missionary campaign. It involved correspondence. 'Do it between you, lads,' the doctor said blandly one morning, leaving us a pile of circulars to address. I sulked, Vereker was gracious, Robin glum. But as soon as the doctor had left the study Vereker swore he would see everybody exactly where the doctor wished them not to go before he would bother over the beastly things. My observations were not pious; but it was, as usual, the unlucky Robin who was caught by the doctor coming back with an afterthought.

"'Confound the blessed nigger!' Robin was complaining. 'White bishops are nuisance enough. I wish to goodness he'd convert the governor and take *him* off to Timbuctoo to show about at nigger meetings, and leave us to have a little peace.'

"Ashworth was still at Coventry for this expression on the day the bishop was expected. A curate and a churchwarden were invited to meet him. He was to arrive at seven and dine at half-past. Rob and I, to make room, were to dine alone together in the study.

"We were in the drawing-room, all but Robin, about seven that night. Aunt Berry was on the sofa in state, with the churchwarden at her side; the doctor on the hearth rug, his hands under his coat tails, talking to the curate; Vereker, with a book of engravings at a distant table, drawing caricatures of Aunt Berry and the doctor; I, a little behind him, wishing the dinner bell would ring, and planning a quiet read after dinner. It was a stormy October night,

curtains were drawn, lamps lit, a bright little fire burning.

"When the doorbell rang the doctor, thinking it was the bishop, left the room to receive him in the hall. I heard the two voices just outside the door, the bishop's a little nasal and high pitched. He would rather come to the drawing-room at once, was not wet, having driven from the station.

"So the doctor, beaming and gracious, brought in the honoured guest and solemnly introduced the Bishop of Nigritia to 'my sister, Miss Ashworth,' who was delighted and honoured to make the personal acquaintance of one so deeply revered, whose labours in the vineyard had so greatly edified the Christian world. Then the curate was presented to the bishop; then the churchwarden, Vereker, and myself.

"We had all risen at the bishop's entrance, and looked at him with quite as much curiosity as was decent. His costume was correct, gaiters, apron, and all, but of a marvellously bad fit; Vereker suggested to me that he

had grown lean owing to long abstinence from cold roast missionary. He had an intelligent, grave face, with well-formed European features, large, soft eyes, grizzled wool, and plenty of it. He was about the doctor's height, we observed, as he stood beside him on the hearth rug. Indeed, he was not unlike a black replica of the doctor, though rather wide in the waist; his manner was dignified and commanding, yet suave; he had more gesture than one expects in an English bishop, a foreign accent, yet a ready flow of speech.

"He lamented the coldness of English congregations and the sad lack of enthusiasm and resulting pence at the last missionary meeting over which he had presided, told one or two delightful anecdotes of converted native chiefs, and inquired tenderly for the date of the curate's conversion. He praised the missionary zeal (measured by subscriptions) in the doctor's parish.

"At the doctor's desire he narrated the detailed circumstances that had resulted in the conversion and baptism of a whole Afri-

can tribe at his preaching. He suffered the doctor to question and draw him out, and explain him to the company with the amiable readiness of a celebrity in the hands of an interviewer.

"The accounts of the persecutions he had suffered from his tribe in consequence of his conversion were under rather than over stated, he said. He had been roasted over a slow fire, he rejoiced to say; in fact he had been done quite brown. The doctor looked somewhat bewildered at this expression, but Aunt Berry and the churchwarden were quite overcome by the bishop's wit, and laughed as ecstatically as if they were at a religious meeting, and the doctor finally joined in.

"The bishop seemed pained by their levity. 'I did deserve dis roast,' he added sadly, 'for I was de most bad man, de biggest sinner in all dis world.' He paused, overcome by emotion, and put his handkerchief to his face, his shoulders heaving. 'Alas!' he added, subduing his feelings with difficulty, 'it was too sad. I did eat my fellow-

men and'—with a deep sigh—'dey did not always agree with me.'

"A sort of delighted horror sat on Aunt Berry's face at this revelation; the churchwarden ejaculated in a tone that combined reprobation with approval; the curate—it was that dear little chap, Kendal, Ruby, you remember him, he worshipped at your shrine—being consumptive and gentle-hearted, looked as if he were halfway between Dover and Calais on a choppy sea; the doctor stared; Vereker was so much overcome that, putting his handkerchief to his face, he jumped up and went and sat in a dimly lighted corner of the conservatory adjoining the room, where I heard him gurgling and choking. 'Beastly cad,' I thought, 'he's putting it on.' But he wasn't.

"The bishop sighed profoundly and looked round the room in the deep silence with a sort of gratified sadness. 'From dis,' he continued, 'I would save my black brudders; from dis and oder bad sings. My young brudder Kendal is shocked by de badness

of dis nigger, what den would he sink, did he know dose more badder sings I must not tell in dis pious priest house?'

"All, led by the doctor, joined in confused deprecatory murmurs, mingled with expressions of joy at the bishop's conversion, though I thought the doctor still seemed to share the sort of creepiness I felt at the sight of a live nigger who had actually eaten long pork. Vereker stole in from the conservatory and kindly offered Kendal Aunt Berry's smelling bottle, which the little chap haughtily declined. Just at this moment everybody talking at once to the centre of interest, on whom every eye was fixed, the door opened, and the parlour maid announced, gaspingly:

"'The Bishop of Nigritia!'

"My dear Emmie, I never saw people look so flabbergasted in my life, when, in the sudden silence produced by this astounding announcement, a genuine, shiny-faced nigger, with a squab nose, an immense red nether lip, and benign expression, walked in, and began, with courteous self-possession and

in correct English, to apologize for his late arrival, addressing himself first to Aunt Berry, and then looking round for his host, when, of course, he perceived the other black bishop. Then his eyes rolled till we saw nothing but the whites; he lifted up his black hands, which were pink inside, and became speechless.

"The other bishop was speechless; everybody was speechless; Vereker was black in the face with suppressed laughter; the doctor looked lividly pale with rage. Aunt Berry gasped, the churchwarden and the curate stood open-mouthed for at least a minute, when the first bishop, quickly extinguishing the lamp nearest him and signing to Vereker and me to put out the other, dashed across the room to the south window, which, you remember, is opposite the door, and made a clean bolt through it, smashing a pane of glass in his haste and leaving his grizzled wool behind him on the carpet. It was Vereker's wool; he used to wear it when playing the banjo.

"I don't quite remember what followed, but I shall never forget the next morning in the study.

"Vereker and I were first summoned. The sight of that old man's face and his blazing eyes gave me gooseflesh all over. I weakly said something about Robin's 'not meaning anything,' and his father raved at me. That sneak Vereker deplored Robin's flippancy and profanity, and the doctor, to my great joy, fell foul of him. I hoped he would knock him down, but Jim discreetly vanished before he had time to. Then I was ordered out of the room, and Robin called in.

"Rob was really sorry and ashamed. He told me that he had never meant to go so far, but was carried away by the unexpected success of his make-up. 'I didn't think I could have worked such a sell on the governor,' he said, 'and I was certain you fellows would know me. It was Aunt Berry's opening speech that did it. Having got such a rise out of the old girl, I was bound to go on. You all played up to me to that extent I

firmly believed I was the bishop before the end. I shall never forget little Kendal's face when I confessed the long pork.' "

"What could have put such an unlucky prank into his head?" Ruby wondered.

"The real bishop had telegraphed that he was coming by a later train than that first decided on. He had sent a portmanteau on by a morning train; the portmanteau had come unfastened on the way, and the housemaid, seeing the things had got wet, had taken them out and dried and arranged them by the spare bedroom fire. The telegram had been given to Robin, his father not being at home, whereupon the devil entered into him and he planned this unlucky trick.

"The study door was shut upon those two for a long time that morning; we heard loud angry voices from within, and at last a struggle; then the door burst open and Robin came out, pale and wild with anger. He took his hat from the stand, opened the hall door and went out. The doctor followed him and asked where he was going.

"'To the dogs,' he replied, turning with eyes like two live coals, 'since you wish it.'"

"'Stop!' thundered his father, whose face was as the face of a demon, or that of John Knox preaching before Mary, Queen of Scots, 'or never return!'

"But Ashworth walked on, his hat over his eyes, his head bent down, his hands in his pockets. He was in one of his black rages, and Vereker and I both knew better than to interfere with him till he had quieted down. Nothing was heard of him for three mortal months, at the end of which I had a short letter from a hospital. 'Come and see me, I'm all broken up and done for.' And, of course, I went—ah!"

A long, loud peal at the night bell roused the quiet house and broke up the little circle. Even then Beatrice could not quite lose the sound of steps pacing on the flags opposite.

## CHAPTER IV

THE night was bright with moonshine, but the wind roared and rioted round the house till it shuddered as if in a giant's grasp. When the hours had grown small Mrs. Westland, wrapped in a dressing gown, and sitting by the fire with a novel in her hand, looked up to see Beatrice enter the room in like array.

"I can't sleep, Emmie; may I keep you company?" she asked. So they sat and talked brokenly in the lull of the storm.

"It's no use to be jealous," Emmie presently said, "but Arthur worships you still. Why wouldn't you have him?"

"Dear Emmie, I didn't want him. And I don't think he wanted me, really. He is perfectly happy as it is; he couldn't have a better wife."

"Of course not; but men always want what they can't get."

"Until they get it. What a true friend Arthur was to Robin Ashworth. I shall always love your husband for that, Emmie. He it was who made peace between father and son, and put fresh life into that poor fellow, who was sinking from despair. But there were many embassies before terms were obtained that made it possible for Robin to go home and begin again."

"But where had he been?"

"He never would say; silence on that point was one of his stipulations. He had done no wrong, he said; that he had suffered was evident. About that time he was much at my uncle's house. Uncle Jackson and I were both so sorry for him. He used to sing; I accompanied him on the piano. He played the 'cello a little by ear; he had never learnt music. My aunt made him welcome, and Miss Ashworth and the doctor always had a weak spot in their iron hearts for me, so that there was perpet-

ual coming and going between our two houses."

"In plain English, they all fell in love with you—the doctor and all—and you flirted shamefully. The coal scuttle is nearest to you; put on more coal, Ruby."

"Well!" returned Beatrice, as she carefully built up a bright fire, "I dare say I may have carried on with some of them. Did *you* never carry on in the days of your youth? Your sister was one of the set of quite young people so much at my uncle's then. She was distinctly the belle of our set. But one thing I swear—I never gave that Vereker the *slightest* encouragement."

"Of course you gave poor Arthur no encouragement, either."

"I liked Arthur; he was such a loyal, trustworthy fellow, but I think he always understood."

"Or Robin Ashworth?"

"Poor Robin! What a man he might have been if he had had but a chance; everything was against him."

"So Arthur says. He hated the law; I suppose that made him wild."

"Ah! but he was only too thankful to have a chance of any profession but the church. He did very well in the office; my uncles thought him quite a promising pupil. He must have got into serious scrapes during that idle time, and it was not easy to get out of them, I suppose. I wonder why things come back so vividly at times, Em? To-night, now, things long forgotten rise up—little trivial things connected with those old, sweet, sad days——"

Her voice broke, she rose and paced the room; the young matron by the fire looked at her with astonishment, and saw that she was crying.

"Ruby!" she exclaimed. "You — you who have no care, no trouble? Successful, rich, loved, admired, so devoted to the art——"

"Art!" echoed Beatrice, wringing her hands together and flinging them apart again. "Emmie!" she cried, turning, sink-

ing on her knees by her friend's side and allowing herself to be folded in her arms, "Emmie!"

The other rocked slightly, as if hushing one of her babies, "Poor dear!" she murmured, stroking the drooped head. "Ah!" she thought to herself, "she cared for Arthur, after all."

Presently Beatrice raised her head with a change of manner and a curious little laugh. "I feel that I *must* tell it all at times," she said. "I'm like the Ancient Mariner."

"Do, darling, tell me all about it."

Then Beatrice rose and reseated herself in her usual manner, holding a fan to screen her face from the bright fire, and waited for an angry wind gust to die away.

"He was only twenty," she began, "but he looked older, that sad time had aged him, and, despite his devil-may-care manner and open face, one saw that something was weighing upon him; it was as if he had been trapped, and was always trying to get free. Perhaps even this may have had a charm for

me; but he was in reality very charming: every one acknowledged his charm. He was tall and slim, with good features, and really beautiful, laughing eyes.

"I knew that he cared for me; he never said so, but he never concealed it—yet he was capricious, often so distant and cold; then I was piqued—I was barely nineteen, and much cruder than girls are in these days, and—oh, Emmie, I was desperately in love——"

"Poor darling!" murmured the young wife, a little puzzled by this description of her husband. "Girls should never be in love, but it's good for singing, I suppose."

"It is very terrible to be in love like that, where there is such sorrow—such—ah—failure. One does not get over that, you see, and it means lifelong loneliness, lifelong grief. What does it mean in the life to come, Emmie? Does it mean anything at all, after all? But for the tangle of falsehood round him, I might have saved him. Had I once suspected what it was that

haunted him, why he wore the hunted, trapped look — oh, Emmie! — I might have saved him. No, I won't cry; what are tears in grief like this? I seem happy, do I? Well, one has to live out one's life. It is only at times that it rises up again—the pity of it, the unutterable pity! Well, his story is a common one—I mean the temptation and the fall. Others do worse, infinitely worse, yet rise again to better things. That hard, sour Aunt Berry was not one to confide in. 'Fancy her Heaven and the governor's,' Robin said one day, when I scolded him about neglecting some religious observance, 'I'd rather go to the other place, where one would at least have the comfort of thinking one's friends were better off than oneself.' Poor fellow!

"Well, there was good ice that cold winter. One day some of our set walked to a lake a mile and a half distant—but you know the lake; perhaps you were there, a child, on that very day, that sweet, sad, terrible day. All was perfect; bright, still weather, sun-

shine and wine-like air, so exhilarating and sweet. Tall pines, standing dark against blue sky, and presently darker against the orange, red, and green of a divine sunset, and then above the tree tops the white evening star. And one was young—young and fresh and happy; one didn't know what trouble meant, much less sin and shame. Vain, too, one was, and much admired. I wore a blue gown, fitting closely to the figure, and a small velvet hat, and threw my furs aside to skate. Robin put on my skates; we skated a good deal together hand in hand. It was divine. I heard people say, "What a handsome couple!" as we passed them. His eyes were full of fire, the clear red was in his face, and I looked up and saw—what I knew before—that he loved me. We flew together round and round that lake.

"Presently, when the sun was dropping behind the pines, we sat on the bank and looked on. Suddenly Robin exclaimed, 'That beastly cad Vereker!' Vereker had knocked down some boys on a slide, skating through

them, spoiling their slide, and leaving them howling. 'I beg your pardon, Miss Ford,' he added. 'Why do you beg my pardon?' I asked. 'He *is* a cad, and I only wish I was big enough to knock *him* down.' Then somehow it came out that he supposed me to be engaged to Vereker—imagine my indignation!—and that Vereker was his authority for this. And in the surprise of finding me free his feelings came out, and I suppose mine too. And well, it was heaven. We skated no more, but wandered in the wood.

"Then he blamed himself for his selfishness and presumption; he was so utterly unworthy, had been a bad fellow, a scamp—I did not know how low he had fallen. Had he ever thought I could have cared for him he would have been different; even now he hoped to mend and live better, and become perhaps a decent fellow for my sake. But I was not to be bound to him, only to let him hope that he might win me; hope would make a man of him. Poor boy! He looked so manly, so winning; his voice was deep and

so musical. Oh, Emmie! I was happy—happy. But it was too late. One short month earlier would have made all the difference.

"In the midst of all this happiness and poetry we somehow found ourselves at home; a full moon had risen in the meantime and shone the darkness of real night away. Oh! I can see Robin now, springing lightly up the steps at my uncle's, and opening the door for me with a sort of tender pride in me. I passed in, looking up into his beautiful eyes: how full of happiness they were, poor fellow! Only think; his sister married and left home when he was but a baby. I was the first woman who had ever really cared for him. He came in and shut the door. We lingered by a table in the hall, talking. Then, when least expected, the bolt fell.

"The hall was brightly lighted; he laid my skates and his own on the table, and was turning to me with some tender jest, when Uncle Jackson came out of the library with

that in his face that made my heart sick. 'Is that you, Ashworth?' he said, in a hard, harsh voice. 'Step this way, will you?'

"Robin looked once at me. Oh, my dear! the agony and despair in those poor, beautiful eyes—the expression of a dumb, hunted creature! He turned white, so white that I thought he was going to fall; but he followed my grim uncle into the library. The door closed upon him; I never saw him again. I stood dumb and still with unspeakable horror, alone in the centre of the hall. The skates lay there, as he left them, for weeks.

"When he entered the library, where Uncle Roger and others sat, he was asked to turn out his pockets. He did so; they contained marked coin, easily identified. My uncles promised not to prosecute. My uncles acted unmercifully. I would not live with them afterward. They stipulated, a cruel and wicked stipulation, that he should leave the place. He left that night. He has not been heard of since."

"Oh, Ruby, dear Ruby! I never guessed this. But to leave you without a word!"

"No, not without a word. Next morning I had a letter with a local postmark. I was to forget him and be happy, he said; he ought not to have spoken, irretrievably disgraced as he was, but his feelings carried him away. The memory of that afternoon would save him from despair, and help him to lead a clean life. This town would know him no more. Nothing could excuse him; but perhaps I did not know what it was for a man in his position to be entirely without money. He had borrowed and bet and played in the hope of being able to repay, which is a short cut to the bottomless pit. Then he had done worse, still buoyed up by that false hope of luck. After that he had stolen down to the quay at night and helped unload ships coming in with the tide; he had blacked his face and sung in public houses, to be able to replace what was taken, and sold the watch he had pretended to lose. As for asking his father, well, you know,

there is no mercy in that quarter. The letter ended with a good-bye that broke my heart.

"Emmie, I went straight to his father with that letter; I went in hot indignation. 'This is your work!' I cried, to his face. I don't know what I said; I was mad with the misery and the pity of it, and I was only nineteen. I called him a pharisee and a devil worshipper, and told him that the ruin of that young life lay at his door. And he—instead of cursing me—he said no word till I had spent my wrath and saw that he was shedding slow and bitter tears; then he replied that I could not reproach him as bitterly as he reproached himself. 'And yet,' he added, 'God knows that I loved the lad the best of them all.' At that I burst out crying, and threw my arms round his neck and kissed him — I suppose nobody had kissed his hard, old face for years. That is the secret of our great friendship, our common love and sorrow, and his gratitude to me for abusing him.

"He has been another and gentler man

ever since. And in all his seeking and hoping for Robin he tells me he is quite, quite sure he shall see him once more before he dies. I am not so hopeful, but I never sing in public without thinking that my poor Robin may be one of the audience. Something tells me he is still alive, that he can not die without my knowing it, and— Oh, Emmie, your husband is at the door! I must fly!"

All through her dreams Emmie, like the man who paced the pavement opposite till the Westland's lights were out, heard the clear voice singing:

"Oh! I can ne'er forget
Robin Adair!"

The wind had fallen when they woke on Sunday morning; the autumn sunshine, hot, even sultry, clouding over in the still afternoon in breathless heat, and breaking out luridly at sunset against an edge of coppery-purple storm cloud rolling up against the wind. Beatrice went in the afternoon to the vicarage, where she poured out his tea

for Dr. Ashworth and walked down to the church with him, leaving him at the vestry door, and joining the Westlands on their way to church.

The organ was rolling out magnificent storms of music as they entered. They recognised a finer, surer touch and deeper feeling than that of the official organist—who was often persuaded to let others play for him—and forgot the oppression of the sultry, starless night. The vicar was vexed at the length of the voluntary, and darted a severe look toward the organ gallery at the west end, where the organist could see chancel, choir, and pulpit in a mirror. Then the music died down on a minor note, and a young curate intoned, "I will arise and go to my Father," and, being only in deacon's orders, waited after the confession, while the vicar rose in the choir and turned, silver-haired, venerable in his white surplice and scarlet doctor's hood, to pronounce the absolution and remission of the people's sins.

The church was spacious and lofty; the pulpit was placed high just outside the chancel, so that the vicar's passage down the choir and up the pulpit steps occupied some seconds, and was accompanied by a grave yet exultant organ strain.

The lights all over the church were lowered because of the oppressive heat, through which the boom of advancing thunder rolled and sheet lightning flashed. The sermon was not far advanced, when there followed such a hissing, roaring down-rush of rain on the echoing roofs that the preacher's resonant voice was drowned, and he was obliged to stop.

It was very awesome to the Westland children, looking up in the dim light, to see the silent throng of worshippers and the silenced priest, and hear the roar of the great tempest in the outer darkness. Then suddenly, above the rush of rain and sullen growl of thunder, came a sound the like whereof had not been heard in that church before—a peal of eight bells, ringing clear

and regular, as if for a wedding; a second peal, hurried and confused; then the clash and clang of all the eight bells in the tower together.

Before the startled people, looking up, white and wild-eyed, could realize that the familiar church bells were sounding of themselves, untouched by mortal hand, there cracked and crashed such a peal of thunder as seemed to rend the roofs asunder and topple down the tower—a sound that swallowed up the startled cries of women and children and the continuous chiming and clashing of bells. When that terrific and complicated noise of elemental war had grown faint enough to let the clanging bells be heard again the church was permeated by a sulphureous smell, a puff of smoke rolled from a gallery at the west end, there was a shrill, agonized shriek of "Fire!" followed by the extinction of every light in the church.

"The tower is struck, and they've turned off the gas at the main," said Westland, who, with his wife and two children and Beatrice,

sat in the nave a little below the chancel. "Keep steady and firm in the rush. Hold the girl standing on the seat. I'll hold the boy."

Then followed a scene beyond imagining; the building that a moment before had resounded with psalmody, measured, solemn, swelled by hundreds of reverent voices, and borne upon billows of organ music, that had echoed the outpoured prayer and praise of a worshipping multitude, words of prophet and evangelist, and the well-known voice of the preacher, was filled with sounds of terror and wrath, anguish and despair; shrieks of frightened, trampled women and children; threats and execrations of maddened men, trying here to free a passage, there to stem the onrush of the congested crowd, that prevented the inward opening of doors, round which raged a fierce fight in the dark; calling of parent to child, child to parent, friend to friend; cracking of woodwork where people forced pew doors and climbed hither and thither; groans and cries of pain; shattering

of glass where a window was climbed and forced; and ever through the thick, heavy dark, terribly invaded at moments by blinding flashes of lightning, the weird, unearthly clashing of the church bells, the hiss and drum of rain on the roofs, the sullen, fierce growl, the low, distant rumble, or loud crash and roar of savage thunder.

There were, however, two tiny isles of light left in the gloom, the pulpit candles, illuminating the gray old priest in his white surplice dashed with scarlet, and those at the organ, showing the white-robed organist, who, like the priest, beckoned to the people. They were not seen in the tumult and agony until in a lull of the storm a deep and powerful voice, calling, "Keep your places! Be men!" attracted many eyes to the little light by the organ, and a fainter echo in a similar voice, "Be Christians! be still!" showed the face of the vicar, and recalled some feelings of reverence and duty. Then ensued a faint lull, through which a powerful barytone voice arose, singing the

hymn that not long since had died into the solemn hush of prayer:

"O God, our help in ages past,"

This was joined half through the line by the clear notes of Ruby Elliott's trained soprano.

"Our hope for years to come,"

the two blended voices sang, piercing and drowning the pandemonium of human and elemental tumult, recalling the frantic people to discipline, order, and worship, as a bugle call sounded by a gallant child has been known to rally a scattered, demoralized regiment.

The crowd paused like a curbed horse; there was a steady, backward surge, freeing the congestion, delivering the trampled, and permitting the opening of doors, while the choir took up their several parts, and were joined by an ever-increasing volume of voices singing in unison:

"Our refuge from the stormy blast,
And our eternal home:"

to the grand swing of which, helped now by the boom of the organ, the calmed and

reassured congregation moved slowly and orderly, with uplifted hearts, full of religious awe and exultation.

An appalling catastrophe was thus averted, and in ten minutes the darkened, smoke-filled church, fitfully and confusedly lit up by vivid lightning, was emptied as sedately and calmly as in the full light of day—with this difference, that all who could sing joined fervently in the hymn, swayed by an irresistible magnetism, their steps measured by the stately rhythm of the martial melody. The choir marched out last, beginning the hymn for the third time, and behind them, with his flock well ahead, came the aged vicar, slowly descending the pulpit steps, where the young curate, flushed and exultant, waited to give his senior precedence, and share the honour of being last with him.

The storm had by this time abated, the weird bell-ringing ceased; through the unpainted clear-story and aisle windows a full moon shot a silver radiance, imparting an unearthly lustre to the white-robed choir,

the vicar's white hair, and the curate's blonde crop. The organ music rolled on, mixed with the thud! thud! of the fire engines; but the organist was invisible, the lights extinguished, and the west end shrouded in thick smoke.

No one remembered when the organ ceased; the lad who worked the bellows could only dimly recall being half stifled with smoke, caught up in strong arms, and a slit and knotted surplice tied round him by some one, who lowered him into the church and bade him make quickly for the open door, visible in a shaft of moonlight. This he did, and fainted just outside.

The fire, beginning in the lightning-struck belfry, had been promptly shut off from the organ gallery, and thus from the church, by closing and locking the stair-foot doors from within. But a side gallery had caught, and, though the fire had been got under in each place, the smoke had become very dense at the west end by the time the church was emptied. Beyond a few broken

limbs, bruises, and cases of nervous shock no one was hurt, nor was the damage to the church great.

The Westlands and Beatrice sat late round the fire that night, the doctor eloquent on his cherished grievance of insufficient means of exit in case of fire, and fervid in praise of the man who first turned off the gas at the main and then started the hymn at the critical moment. "His voice was like a cathedral bell," he said. "By the way, who was he?"

"And where is he?" added Beatrice.

They found him next morning, face downward, on the gallery floor.

Westland said he must have been dead for some hours, and unconscious probably for more. A small crowd gradually entered the church as the rumour of the death spread. Dr. Ashworth, who had been busy appraising the damage done to the tower, made his way through them to the font, at the foot of which, just inside the church, the unknown organ player, with the smoke stains

removed from his face, was laid in his last, deep sleep.

The old vicar was preoccupied; he was thinking of the weird bell-ringing of the previous night that he had been just discussing in the belfry with Beatrice. "Like wedding bells," they agreed, "forbidden by man, but rung by Heaven's angel, the lightning."

He forgot the bells when he saw the quiet face of the dead; he looked on it, and was silent for a space. Then, spreading his hands in act of benediction, he said softly, as if thinking aloud, "The souls of the righteous are in the hands of God."

After another silent pause, raising his bowed head and turning to the little crowd, "Friends," he said, "this was a righteous man. When you fled in faithless panic to your own destruction, he recalled you to holy courage and prayerful trust in the Most High. He saved this house of prayer from burning, and the people from a dreadful death. He thought of others and forgot himself."

He had scarcely spoken when the crowd parted at the sound of a sharp cry to admit a tall, slender woman, with a marble face and eyes of fire. At her approach the dead man's head—mechanically reverting to a former position—turned as if to welcome her, and she knelt by his side.

"It is Robin—Robin Ashworth!" she cried.

# A SUMMER NIGHT*

## CHAPTER I

SUNBEAMS falling slant and soft toward the close of a long, glowing, glorious summer day, shooting through translucent hangings of gold-green leaves and interstices of grass and cornstalks, stretching long, vague shadows upon sun-drenched turf and dusty roadway, burning in smouldering lustre on the church tower, chimney pots, roofs, and garret windows, touching and dazzling from high western window panes, while the sun-baked streets below lay in cool, deep shadow and townsfolk began to breathe freely and think of restful, pleasant things; sunbeams

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caught by glass of dormer windows and tossed back upon the wall opposite an open casement, where the tailor's son sat coughing, large-eyed and hectic, made his heart faint with longing for the westering light upon the cliffs and sea waves, meadows, woods, and hill slopes he would see no more forever.

The streets began to echo with steps of tired people strolling in the coolness; voices floated, softened yet distinct, on the sweet, still air with the indescribable tonal quality distinctive of summer time. The tailor's son heard snatches of talk rising thus brokenly to the window with the scent of his father's pipe and the sound of his father's slow steps on the pavement, where the latter paced, with rolled-up shirt sleeves and unbuttoned waistcoat, stopping now and again to exchange a word with a passer-by.

Over the way a large private house with two doors was set among the shops. One door stood wide, and offered through a back doorway a glimpse of foliage, garden, and

turf, translucent in the late sunshine, suggestive of infinite stretches of wood and meadow and mossy stream. It was the doctor's house. By and bye perhaps the doctor would step over the way, run up the creaking stair, feel the lad's pulse, chat ten minutes, and run back again. He often did this; it was always a pleasurable possibility to look forward to. The boy was developing a tranquil philosophy; the most delightful things in life, he thought, are the things that may and sometimes do occur. They are also the saddest, but he was not old enough to know that.

The doctor's old, red-brick house was a source of perennial pleasure to the tailor's son, a tranquil stage on which dramas were shown, though seldom played through. The framework of the daily domestic comedy was always visible; an act here, a scene there, suggested endless combinations to be worked out by leisure fancy. The next scene would be lighting of windows and descent of blinds. The table in the room on the right of the

door was laid for supper; he caught gleams of white cloth, glitter of silver and glass, colour of shaded candles ready to be lighted.

The doctor's young wife was standing by the table, smiling softly and putting the last touch to a cool and pleasant arrangement of tenderest green of crisp lettuce, ivory cucumber, young onion shell-white, and deep red radish. Such a salad, in the pretty porcelain bowl that had been a wedding present—such a salad, she thought, as would surprise the doctor, fill him with delight, and make him repent his saying that no female hand could rightly mix a salad.

It did surprise him, because she had used in generous plentitude excellent clear castor oil in mistake for olive. The doctor's wife had yet to learn what tragedy may mar the honeyed peace of conjugal felicity; so she went on, softly smiling, adjusted her slices of hard-boiled egg on the top, and daintily crossed the spoon and fork above, all unconscious of the doom that lurked within the bowl.

A cheerful pop sounded through the open window across the street—the kind of pop that inspires delicious thirst on a hot day, conjuring up visions of cool and ruddy claret, surfy, creaming champagne, or clear amber and ivory of the honest native drink for which the banks of Trent are renowned. The amiable gurgle that followed as the doctor's wife poured the claret into the tall jug was inaudible save to herself. She liked the maids to be out in the evening, if only to give her an opportunity of impressing the doctor with due respect for her household capabilities. One last touch to the bowl of fresh roses a farmer's wife had tucked under the seat of the doctor's dogcart, another to the parsley adorning the cold fowl, a slight pause to consider the advisability of lighting candles, and she went out, slim and pretty in her white gown, softly singing to herself, to call her husband to supper, while the tailor's son watched the gas burst into flame in the surgery, and witnessed the execution of a breakdown, ending in high kicks that

would have assured wealth beyond the dreams of avarice on the London boards, by the surgery boy, whose subsequent enjoyment of an effervescent drink out of the glass physic measure was also visible to him.

"Horace! Horace!" called the doctor's wife, her white figure swallowed up in the green lucent gloom beyond the garden door.

The doctor supposed himself to be reading the Standard in the summerhouse in the company of a short black pipe and a small white dog. He was but just home from a long, dusty round of journeys, his head had fallen forward on his chest, the Standard was slipping over his outstretched legs from one limp hand, and his pipe dropping its dead ashes on the dog's back from the other, while those mellifluous sounds that give pleasing assurance of a good man's slumber played upon the summer air.

"Horace!" cried the doctor's wife. "Lazy fellow!" The little dog jumped up and barked.

"Ay—hum!" muttered the doctor thick-

ly as he opened and closed his heavy eyes. "No night bell! Heaven!"

Through the open doors of garden and street the town sounds floated in—a boy whistling, the far-off roll of a carriage, murmur of voices, the church clock striking in lordly leisure nine mellow strokes on the tremulous, waiting air, and then, a long way off, a sharp, quick click, rousing a sharp, thin echo. The click grew sharper yet fuller; it broadened and was a click no more; the echo ceased, and the tailor's son recognised in the fuller sonority of the strokes the hoof-beats of a galloping horse on the hill; they quickened down the steep descent, grew louder and hollower over the bridge, and full and strong on the hard street road, with a confused ring of echoes. The people turned at the sound of the mad, ever-quickening gallop, to see a strong, firm-necked cob, streaming with sweat, flecked with foam, red of nostril, and with bleeding mouth, ridden by a hatless man in shirt sleeves, tear along the street and thunder up to the doctor's

door, where, pulled on his haunches, he stopped and seemed to shoot his rider to the ground.

No sooner did the man touch the dusty road than he was at the door, tearing at the bells labelled "Night" and "Surgery," leaving the panting horse to blow noisily and shake himself on his quivering legs with down-drooped head. The surgery boy leisurely finished his nefarious drink, and even rinsed the glass before responding to the furious ringing of the bells, faintly curious to see how long and how loud the man could or would ring. The doctor's wife started at the first sharp peal, the little dog barked passionately, the doctor dropped his pipe and made a face.

"Come *di*-rectly—the chicken are taken with the pip—old Grannie Jones has the toothache—*pray* ring a little louder. Where is that scamp of a boy?"

"Horace, you shall *not* go!" his wife decided. "You've had nothing to eat; you are tired out, and *such* a salad I've mixed."

"I won't go! I'll be hanged if I go!"

"Come to supper before the ice melts in the pail. I'll say that you are——"

"Say I'm out, I'm dead, I shan't be home all night, I'm at church, I've got the small-pox," grumbled the doctor, steadily moving all the time, not supperward, whither his wife tried to draw him, but toward the surgery. "I've not been home half an hour. Am I a slave? Can't I have a minute's peace? May I never eat?"

"And the fresh claret you were recommended, dear. *And* the salad," pleaded the anxious wife.

"I'm dog-tired, and not a horse in the stable fit to go."

"Please, sir, it's Mr. Adams, of Thornley, and come at once, and he's rode hard and his horse is blowed," panted the surgery boy.

The tailor's son was excited. He heard not only the loud, continuous ringing at the surgery, but the urgent summons of the hatless rider, who now leant, pale beneath the brown of his drawn, wet face, panting against

the doorpost, staring vacantly at the tailor's window, regardless of the comments and inquiries of a group of loungers, including the tailor, while the blown horse snorted and shook his quivering flanks and the reins loose on his neck.

Presently the man, after a word with the doctor, moved heavily from the door, and, taking the cob's bridle on his arm, led him slowly up and down the road. The doctor and his wife, the latter conspicuous in her white dress, moved quickly about the surgery and consulting room, opening drawers and brass-bound mahogany boxes, taking things out and making up a parcel, while the surgery boy fled like one possessed down the street and round the corner, returning in a dogcart driven by a groom, who leapt to the pavement at the door, when the doctor as quickly leapt into the cart, stowing the parcel under the seat and driving off with lessening clatter down the echoing street, over the bridge, and up the hill into the silence of the sweet summer night.

## CHAPTER II

STEPHEN ADAMS stood still in the road, the bridle on his bare brown arm, and stared stupidly after the dogcart. A great sob broke from his broad, brown chest, the blue-striped shirt on which was open; it was a sob of relief. Then he looked at the cob, and, going over to the old-fashioned inn, relic of past coaching days, the Rose and Crown, called the ostler, and helped him rub the horse down, loosening the girths and rinsing the mouth.

Somebody gave him a hat, which he put on half consciously; then he called for ale, drank a pint, and poured a pint down the tired horse's throat.

"He done it in half an hour—seven mile," he said, looking hard at the half-foundered beast.

"A rare good goer, guv'ner," the ostler returned, patting and smoothing the animal's firm-set neck, "and a rare good un to stay. But you've a took it out of en; there ain't half a kick in all his four legs."

Adams looked thoughtfully at the cob, considering how much go was left in him; and then, taking a parcel the doctor's man had brought him, fixed it to the saddle, feed the ostler, and led the horse briskly away, walking him down the street, over the bridge, and up the hill before he mounted and trotted along the level, slowly at first, and then more quickly through the cooling dusk and dewy scents of field and hedgerow.

Hundreds of years seemed to have passed since he started in the evening sunshine on that mad breakneck gallop, spurred by agonies of fear.

He fell to thinking over all that had passed since he went forth in the morning dew that day, bent upon getting that last grass crop, overripe as it was for lack of hands to save it, mown.

There were still some acres to cart; the hands could go on to the carting when the dew was fully dried. In the meantime a quarter of the heavy grass at least might be down—the whole must be down before dew-fall—and those acres of well-made hay carted besides. To mow one field and cart the other before night—that had seemed the whole aim and problem of existence in the morning.

And Annie must worry him with her petty wants just then! he had flung off with a snarl when she raised herself from the pillow on one arm and called after him as he was leaving the room, only half awake, his heavy eyes full of sleep. Money! Women were always wanting money at the wrong time. What if Jane's wages were a week overdue? She could wait, but that heavy overripe grass could not. Give Annie the key to his strong box to get it? A likely matter! And the weed that had got into the cows' pasture to be seen to besides. Why hadn't Annie told him of the taste in

the butter before? Who but a woman would wait till breakfast that morning to mention it? Who wouldn't have sworn?

Those acres of rich, waving grass, stiff against the scythe, and that insidious weed in the pasture seemed of small moment now. The whole dairy and the year's hay had better have gone before that evening's work was done.

They had been married ten months. Stephen had seen without disquiet Annie's rounded cheek sharpen and pale, and the corners of her young red mouth droop. It was only nature, he thought. And if she was found crying at times, why, it was the way of young wives on the road to motherhood, so he was told. These women's troubles had to be borne. What else were women made for? To be borne quietly, without troubling men. Wives must not be spoiled. Men had troubles enough out of doors; they wanted peace at home.

So had he thought in the morning; but now all his thoughts were changed.

In spite of his moroseness and evil temper, he had been a happy man in the beginning of the day. What would he not give now to drag himself from sound sleep in the morning coolness and drowsily dress and hurry forth, to be called back by Annie? To be standing in the mowers' rank at midday with streaming face, sweeping the long, bright scythe through stiff, thick grass? To be lying, face downward, beneath the hedgerow oak in a pleasant doze, hushed by faint rustling in the cool, green canopy above, half dreaming, half thinking of cheerful things—of heavy hay crops nearly saved, of glorious weather and consequent coming on of blossomed wheat, plumping out of ears of barley and filling of oat husks, as well as of the lucky chance that the child was not to be born till harvest was done, the dairy work lighter, and autumn leisure at hand.

It would not do to have Annie upstairs in harvest or haying time, with twenty cows in milk. She would get through a good summer's work first, and by next summer

the boy would be grown to be a plaything good to toss. Of course it would be a boy.

"Stephen," he heard continually above the cob's trot on the dusty highroad, "do listen, Stephen! Indeed, it's of consequence!"

Of all things he hated a complaining woman, and the querulous tone in Annie's voice irritated him. He knew that he was not sweet-tempered, was ungracious, taciturn, irritable. Annie should have known it too, and forborne to worry him. A whole day often passed without a word from him; he meant no harm. He hated senseless chatter; she knew it was only his way. Yet he promised his conscience that if Annie were but spared he would be kinder, more sociable, gentler forever after. If!

He turned sick, and pressed his heels into the tired horse's side. The possibility was infinitesimal. The cob quickened his weary trot; Stephen thought he might be too late.

The tailor's son was still at the window, watching the street lamps sparkle out on the

dusk and a few silver stars powder the pale strip of sky that ran like a river between the black roofs. He saw the untasted supper in the opposite room, where no one remembered to draw the blinds, and caught the gleam of Mrs. Newman's white gown as she passed the open doors, pacing disconsolate in the garden, waiting for her husband.

And always he saw the spare, sinewy figure of Stephen Adams, his sunburnt, hard-featured face, with red-brown beard and thick hair matted over a strong, stubborn forehead. Always he heard the words, "Shot through the body." Who was shot, and by whom? "Wife," "Loaded gun," were the only words he could make out in the farmer's hurried, urgent message.

But Stephen was hearing that shot over and over again, together with Annie's words, above the cob's footfalls, the drone of chafers, voice of corn crakes, and chirp of grasshoppers, and a mist of blood sometimes came before his hot, dazed eyes.

The mowing had been quite finished, the

hay had been carted long before the dews began to fall. The sun was low when at last he went into the wide brewus or outer kitchen to replace his gun in the rack after firing at rooks in the wheat beyond the orchard. He had fired both barrels, reloaded, and fired again more than once; he had a young rabbit, just shot, in his hand. He threw it on the table when Annie came in, white and anxious.

"Stephen, I must speak in private. It's serious. It's about—it's Willis Arley——" so far she had panted.

He had always despised and disliked Willis Arley, a fellow who never succeeded in anything he tried to do, who read and wrote when he should have been ploughing and sowing, who left his father's farm and set up for a scribbler in London till he nearly starved. He had been one of Annie's numerous sweethearts. Stephen had a vague notion that she had favoured him at one time before her father stepped between them and forbade Arley the house.

It was an old story, so old that it had not occurred to Stephen even to be jealous. Arley had not been near the place for years; there was a rumour that he was gone for a soldier, that he was in Australia. He was no longer spoken of now; his brother had the farm, his mother lived in a vine-covered stone house near the church. Stephen seemed to remember that she was very ill; Dr. Newman's dogcart had been seen outside the vine-covered house that afternoon.

Yet when Annie spoke the half-forgotten name he turned with one of his impatient jerks, the gun still in his hand, and—how did it happen?—the maidservant was standing by, the only witness—what did she know?—the gun must have been cocked, he must have touched the trigger, there was a report, a cry—Annie was down; there was blood on the stone-paved floor.

Then followed cries of alarm and horror, people running in, the saddling and bridling and mad galloping of the cob along the dusty seven-mile road to the town.

The night sparkled with pale stars, the breath of honeysuckle hung about meadow and garden when he rode into his own yard and looked anxiously at his house, dimly outlined in the gray summer dusk that would not deepen before dawn reddened the sky.

A dim light showed in the rose-bowered window upstairs, another dim light in the kitchen below; neither window was curtained. All was not yet over. His quick step, heavy with nailed boots, was on the uncarpeted oaken stair, where an eight-day clock ticked with steady patience on the landing and vaguely comforted him, quieting the fever of his blood with familiar, home-like voice. Outside the bedroom door he paused, sick at heart, then softly turned the handle and entered.

Annie's face, white and sharp, was on the white pillow, her dark hair, loosened and tangled, lay over pillow and sheet; the doctor was bending above her, doing something to her wounded side; a woman wiped blood from the pale lips—lips softly smiling in spite

of the quick, gasping breath that parted them.

Annie's beautiful dark eyes were full of light—such light as he had never seen in them, a light directed to the gaze of a tall man in a smock frock standing by the bed in the shadow of the curtains.

What man? His startled glance searched in the shadow and discerned the half-forgotten, thoughtful features of the white-handed dreamer, the wastrel, the ne'er-do-weel Willis Arley. He found himself narrowly observing the clean white smock, worn somehow with a difference; beneath the evidently unaccustomed garment he detected the narrow red stripe of regimental trousers; above it the trim mustache, the clean-shaven face, and cropped hair that bespoke the soldier.

A faint shiver went through Arley's frame at Stephen's approach; Annie's eyes lost their light, and turned to her husband's face with a piteous pleading.

"I tried hard, Stephen," she panted, in a slow, strained voice, that already seemed to

come from very far off. "If you had a-cared for me, if you had a-spoke a kind word! And the child and all coming—I could a-been a good wife——" The voice broke into inarticulate mutterings, the dark eyes closed. Stephen and Arley heard nothing but the throbbing of their own hearts and Annie's sibilant breathing; a waft of flower-spiced air shook the feeble candle flame, a moth dashed madly through it; the doctor put something to the pale lips; the patient seemed to sleep.

Some seconds passed. Arley stood rigid and erect; cold dews stood on Stephen's strong, square brow; his mouth was parched.

Then Annie started up. "Forgive!" she cried, gazing into her husband's drawn face, and stretching out her hands to him. The effort brought blood to her mouth; she fell back, her eyes turning to Arley and closing with a smile forever.

After what seemed a very short time Adams found himself in the kitchen, where a fire had been kindled and a candle burned dimly, but not so dimly that he did not see

dark, wet stains on the stone floor. The doctor was holding his arm firmly; Arley was standing before him with a sullen, defiant gaze in his large, dreamy eyes.

"It's four years since I saw Annie Duke, Mr. Adams," he was saying, "till this afternoon. Mother died at five o'clock. I'd overstayed my leave, and they were after me. I slipped along the hedge in the ditch to your orchard, and so through the garden and woodhouse, where your wife saw me and took me to the strong-beer cellar and hid me and gave me the smock frock. There I should have stayed until I could have got off quietly in plain clothes. But I heard the shot and the cries, and ran out and helped carry her up. That's all I have to say."

"And that's enough," said a deep voice from a dark corner, whence issued two soldiers, while a third appeared at the door.

"Quite enough," replied Arley, saluting. "Good-night, friends."

"Good-night," replied Adams mechanically as the deserter and the three soldiers,

with a "Good-night, all," vanished into the pale gloom, where their measured tread gradually died away into silence.

"Her last look was for him, and I killed her," Adams muttered to himself.

"I was never more sorry for anybody in my life, Mabel," the doctor told his wife afterward. "The man was like a stone. The woman told him his wife had said she was glad to go — thankful for the shot."

The tailor's son slept but brokenly; he was often glad to hear solitary footsteps echoing along the silent streets and passing into the cool and pleasant night; his spirit seemed to pass into the freshness with the unknown steps. He waked to-night to hear the belfry clock chime four quarters and strike twice on the deep bell, that sounded fuller and more solemn in the silence of the night. The air stole fresh and sweet through the open window. It was not unpleasant to be awake in the restful stillness. The quarter chimed and the half hour. The bells were

like the voice of watching spirits, telling that all is well.

Then from far off rose faint roll of wheels and quick beat of hoofs, louder and louder, till the sound ceased at the opposite door, and the doctor drowsily dropped to the pavement. He was cheered to see the red light of the shaded candles on the table where the supper was still waiting; cheered still more by the sight of his wife opening the door, flushed with sleep, in her white dressing gown with pink ribbons, her shining hair gathered into a long thick plait over one shoulder, her eyes bright with welcome and kindness.

He thought of poor Annie's words: "If you'd a-cared for me, if you'd a-said a kind word——" So, to keep himself from oversoftness, he roundly rated Mrs. Newman for being up.

But she only laughed and stopped his mouth in the proper way.

The tailor's son heard the next chime and the next while trying to guess at the history

of the doctor's errand; the summer dawn came and wasted splendour of purple and gold upon unseen tower and silent town; the boy slept sweetly at last, lulled by the unbroken quiet.

# THE WIDOW'S CLOCK

## I

THREE bells having just droned a scant congregation into church, quiet settled back on the sunny village road, where stone cottages muffled in hollyhocks and roses drowsed in Sunday peace. Cats mused blissfully on garden walls; dogs blinked on doorsteps, muzzle on outstretched paws; robins withheld their song till sunset; even swallows deferred their airy dance till cooler air should stir the golden lime leaves in the avenue between the church and Nutcombe Place, so warm and still was the September day. Presently the stillness was broken by the slow steps of a young labourer, with dark, lustrous, south-country eyes, curly hair, and a ruddy,

harvest-tanned face. A snowy smock tucked into dark blue trousers, black sailor tie, and soft felt hat formed his costume, set off by a carnation in his hat.

Expectancy without agitation was on his face; he stopped and looked behind him now and then, but his expectancy was chiefly in the forward direction. Nothing larger than a hedge sparrow stirred the thick dust of the village street through which he strolled to the last cottage, which was overshadowed by the trees of Nutcombe Place, and whence the highroad climbed steeply under thick umbrage, cool and dim with mystery of broken lights and shadowy distance.

Into the solemn gloom of this tree-roofed aisle he gazed long, then returned to the church, where, leaning on the mossed, stone wall, he waited until the gnomon of the sun-dial threw a longer shadow, the drowsy sermon drew to a drowsy end, and the congregation filtered out into the sunlight to a slow organ boom and melted slowly away. Disappointment again, tempered by the sight

of a middle-aged woman in decent black, her prayer book wrapped in a handkerchief, with a sprig of lad's love upon it, with whom he turned to walk.

"You haven't seen our Annie, hev ee, Joseph?" she asked. "I thought she'd be stepping along to-day."

"I should a-seen her if she'd a-ben in church," he replied, and said no more till they reached the other end of the village, and, with a glance into the sylvan shadows, turned across a green embowered in lindens, and then up a lane to Mrs. Burt's solitary cottage, and through her garden between lavender and gooseberry bushes.

"Lonesome for ee," he said when she unlocked the cottage door and they stepped into the cool gloom within.

"Lonesome a-nights winter time," she replied, laying aside bonnet and shawl and unhooking a kettle from the cottrel over the hearth. This Joseph took and filled at a draw well in the garden, while she laid brushwood on the embers and blew them up.

"Lonesome it is," she repeated when he came back, "but anybody do like themselves to themselves. There's the cat and the clock for company. I don't know but the clock is nigh as good company as 'Liza and her kittens, ticktacken, ticktacken, night and noon. 'Liza she'll bide outdoors now and again, but wold clock always bides indoors 'long with me."

Eliza elongated her graceful tortoiseshell body and stretched out a white paw in acknowledgment of this compliment, casually cuffing a mutinous kitten before she turned again to her rest on the only cushioned chair, and the clocked ticked away with an elfish semblance of humanity on its face.

"He's a middling timekeeper, I reckon," Joseph returned, comparing his great silver watch with the polished metal dial of the clock, which had often seemed to smile welcome or frown reproof upon him when as a child his small legs carried him up to the cottage on errands from his mother.

"If the chaps in Nutcombe was half as

stiddy as he, Joseph, I reckon 'twould be a happier place for women folk. Ay, he's a rare good un: oak wood outside and brass all about en. He do set the place off, don't he? My poor master set store by en. Jim and the rest is always miserable glad to see wold clock when they come home. He do look that friendly at 'em, they allow. He's willed to Jim, being the oldest."

"Ay," returned Joseph, who had caught the sound of a tired footstep some seconds before the click of the wicket made Mrs. Burt hurry out, her face lighting up with pleasure, to receive the belated guest with such a kiss as made Joseph, modestly standing aside, blush and sigh.

"Do ee set down and rest," he heard in the widow's voice as a young woman's face, pink with heat, and her comely, country-set figure appeared with a basket, that she set on the polished walnut table. "You be tired, Annie. Whatever made ee so late?"

"Entirely twickered out," sighed the girl with a spiritless air. "Why"—the red

rushed over her face, her blue eyes lighted, a vital energy changed her dejected posture—"why," she laughed gayly, "I didn't know there was company."

"I just come in," faltered Joseph, blushing furiously. "Must go on home now."

"You just set down, Joseph Woodnutt, and hev a cup of tea," said his hostess, pushing him to a wooden chair, and taking Annie's hat from her thick yellow plaits, while 'Liza, slowly conquering her self-indulgence, rose, yawned comfortably, stretched her soft, bright body into serpentine length, and paced majestically to the newcomer, on whose lap she graciously accommodated her furry limbs, with a happy croon and patronizing wink, her actions closely copied by a small semblance of herself. Ah, 'Liza, you be glad to see our Annie, I allow. Crafty little vaggot, she knows there's cream in that there basket."

"Mistress went out and cut the cucumber herself," Annie said, unpacking the basket. "And I was to thank ee kindly for

the honeycomb. And would ee spare her a root of the new dahlias? If ee want to know what made me late, mother," she added acidly, "'twas owing to a friend promised to meet me top of hill by the pond meadow; and there I set, waiten and waiten till I felt that silly——"

"Oh, goo on with ee, Annie!" cried Joseph. "You said I was to bide down bottom of shute for ee——"

"I never said it and you never done it," she retorted sharply and half crying. "Catch me waiten for anybody again! There's plenty ready to walk out and do as they promise without making a fool of anybody."

"Well, there!" the unfortunate swain lamented. "Did ever anybody know anything onraisonabler than a young maid? There I ben jackassen about dree good hours and more."

"'Jackassen,' indeed! That's all some are fit for! There, mother, there's no call for ee to look like that. Give en some tea,

do, and tell en to look smarter if he wants anybody to walk with en."

"Come, come, you be tired out, Annie, carren the girt basket," her mother returned. "Whatever do ee think? Her la'ship was after wold clock agen yesterday. She'll give thirty pound for en now without his innards."

"Don't ee take it, mother. *He* keeps time," with a withering glance at Joseph. "Why, you'd be entirely lost without en. And 'twouldn't be the same place to us. He *do* look that homely when we step in. Her ladyship has clocks all over the place, covered with gold cupids and birds."

"There's clocks and clocks," observed Joseph, taking heart of grace. "This here's a fancy clock. Mayn't I see ee home by and bye, Annie?" rising to go.

"There's fools and fools," she replied, apparently addressing 'Liza, "but there ain't such a fancy fool in this house as 'ud wait after eight to be seen home along."

"Annie," her mother said when he was gone, "Joseph Woodnutt is stiddy and good-

hearted. He's put money by. His father has the carpentering business, and his vield and cows and pigs and all. Joseph can turn his hand to most anything. I'd like to see ee goo to church long with he. Don't ee set en down too much. A was put off, a set entirely mumchanced to-night."

"Why hadn't he come along then, great noghead?" she retorted.

But she was careful to watch the clock and leave the cottage when its eight strokes quivered out; and her mother, watching her disappear through the wicket, was not surprised to see the gleam of a white smock through the starlit gloom, or to hear the sound of a man's step in time with Annie's.

But what had Annie meant by her anxious questions touching Jim?

"You haven't seen our Jim? You haven't heard anything? They were all right at Jim's?"

Of course they were all right. Clever, steady Jim, risen to be foreman at the poultry and egg shop in the town, and likely to

be partner, Jim was the family success; they all took rank from Jim. Mrs. Burt's heart swelled when on holidays the poulterer's light cart drove through the village, and Jim and his smart wife and children jumped down and turned up the path to her cottage. She liked to talk of "My son James, him that's foreman at Stevenson's." Her husband had been but a farm labourer. His children were like to be wealthy tradespeople, she mused, turning back to her lonely cottage, where 'Liza slumbered and the clock ticked, and she opened her Bible with a grateful heart.

She had not read far before she heard footsteps and the click of the wicket, and saw a moving shadow on the lane of light in the garden.

A quick tap on the door made her heart jump. Who could be coming so late to her solitary cottage? Going quickly to the door, she found a stranger, a town youth, who, asking if this were Mrs. Burt's, dropped a letter into her hand and vanished in the gloom before she had time to speak to him

or to see that the letter was in a familiar hand.

She turned slowly back to the candle, pondering and turning the packet over in her hand as she went; then, sitting down, she opened it cautiously, as one fulfilling a grave and unusual duty, and began to spell it slowly out.

"Dear mother," the letter began, "I write in haste to save time, as young Williams is going through Nutcombe this morning. Come in straight away. I did wrong, but I never meant it, owing to a sudden temptation. I thought to make it all right again. But, dear mother, if I can't raise fifty pounds by Wednesday I'm a lost man. Jane knows naught. Her heart will be broken and the children ruined. I thought you might have some old sticks to raise something on I could pay off later. William has something put by. I'd borrow at fifty per cent, and perhaps Annie and the rest could lend on the same terms. No more at present. Your dutiful son,

"JAMES BURT."

The poor woman laboriously spelled it through twice, unable to credit the facts thus curtly stated, or to grasp the full meaning of these bitter words for some time. Presently, after staring blindly at the paper in her shaking hands, she suddenly felt the whole weight of her mischance descend heavily upon her aching heart, and fell forward on the table, her head on her arms, with a heavy sigh.

She remained thus quite still, while the clock ticked, the kitten leapt upon 'Liza, who waked and played, and a star, visible through the lattice, passed out of sight. The clock struck the hour and the quarter after, and ticked stolidly on; 'Liza, weary of play, looked up in vain for notice. At last she cuffed the kitten off, sprang on the table, and examined her mistress with profound disquiet and eyes growing rounder and rounder. Then, finding neither mews nor purrs availed, she gently licked the still, white face until Mrs. Burt regained consciousness, and with it memory.

"Ah, 'Liza!" she said, unclosing her eyes, feeling 'Liza's soft fur rubbed upon her face, "you'd better let me bide. You dunno what 'tis to be a ooman."

Then she cried bitterly, thinking of the calamity and shame that had befallen her.

## II

On the following Thursday Joseph Woodnutt lingered, as he often did after dusk, by the orchard wall of the farm where Annie served. Now he whistled and looked up at an attic window that shone silvery in a young moon's light, then waited in the dappled shadows, his hands in his pockets, his figure motionless. A tree heavy with ruddy apples hung over the wall above him, the scent of ripe fruit mingled with the pleasant smell of fresh-stacked wheat. Save for the stamp of a stabled horse, the crop-crop of cows munching grass, rustle of mouse, and fall of mellow fruit, all was quiet; so quiet that he heard the click of a lattice hasp upon the roof, and looked up to see the window opened. Then it was not long before the rustle of skirts over orchard grass was heard,

and the face he expected appeared, pale in the moonlight, set in fruit-laden boughs.

Then there followed a sound that poets have likened to the breaking of ripe fruit, the wall being scarcely breast high.

"It's the last," Annie suddenly sobbed after this time-hallowed rite. "I mustn't go with ee no more, Joseph."

Promptly falsifying the first proposition, as a true lover should, he asked what she meant by the second.

"I'm not one to go a beggar to a honest man, and every penny I hev is gone," she explained. "Anybody as marries me'll have to wait years and years."

"I'd sooner wait a hundred years for you, Annie, dear, than marry a millenaire's daughter," was the prompt and earnest response. "I want ee, my dear; I don't want money."

"Mother has sold the clock," she said, extricating herself from his arms. "Poor mother's heart's broke, and, dear Joe, the family's going down, and I must giv' ee back

the watch and all. And may you find a b-better girl, as will—love ee t-true and m-make ee a n-n-nice home."

"May I be blowed," cried Joseph, "if ever I'll give ee up or take back anything I ever giv' ee! Look here, Annie, you and me hev ben sweethearten this two year, though 'twas only a Sunday you said 'Yes,' and a nice dance you've led me. I've put up with it because a man ought to give in to a maid's whimsies. And I always acted honest. But you and me is man and wife before One above, Annie, and the devil hisself sha'n't put us asunder!"

"'Twill be a long wait, Joe, and I ought not to bind ee to it," was the wistful rejoinder. "And I won't!" she added. "But I'll act true. Do ee see this, dear Joe?" drawing a small Testament from her pocket. "Will ee swear on the book what I tell ee shall go no further?"

He looked steadily into the clear blue eyes swimming in tears, then he looked at the lane of dappled moonlight on the grass,

then at Annie again, and a throb of deep feeling shook his heart, and mingled with it absolute trust in the rectitude and good sense of the comely young woman who loved him.

"You wouldn't ask me what was wrong, Annie, dear," he said, his eyes aglow with fervour, "so I'll swear."

He kissed the book reverently, then his arms went round his sweetheart, and he kissed her with the same earnestness. Her head sank on his shoulder, she cried softly, and told him all her trouble.

"And the end of all this here is," was his summary at the close, "that I'll never give ee up. If you'll be true to me, Annie, I'll bide a hundred years for ee. But I sha'n't have to bide long," he added. "Mother shall have wold clock back again, as sure as my name's Joe Woodnutt. And you and me——"

"Go on with ee, do!" was the tart rejoinder, accompanied by a hearty cuff that made him laugh and stagger. "There's nine

o'clock, and missus calling, and you yollupping and making such a chearm as never was."

With that she turned and skimmed over the grass and away under the boughs; and Joseph, laughing, turned and trudged home, whistling thoughtfully and becoming graver and graver as he went.

A few days later, when the slant autumn sunlight was pouring through yellowing limes and copper-touched beeches, a tall young woman in a straw hat and linen blouse was descending the wooded slopes of Nutcombe Place, singing and leading a sunny-haired child by the hand.

More slowly followed a donkey led by a boy, and bearing panniers containing younger children, picking its steps daintily, surely, on the steep descent.

Down between sun-dappled tree boles mother and child danced, singing till they reached a seat on a mossy level beneath some crimson cherry trees, whence a view of Nutcombe Place, surrounded by gar-

dens and backed by ancient trees, was visible.

"Muvver, a story, please," the little maid was beginning when a long shadow fell across their feet, and a sturdy, dark-eyed labourer stood before them.

"Beg you ladyship's pardon," he said as she looked up in surprise not unmixed with displeasure; "I make bold to ask ee a favour."

"So it appears. You are not one of our people."

"No, your la'ship. But I be Nutcombe born; son of Ezekiel Woodnutt, carpenter, that lives down at the crossroads, by the stream."

"Ah! Woodnutt, the carpenter, in the tiled cottage with the vine. Where the bee-hives are, Gwenny," she added to the child, who nodded assent.

"Mr. Barton," continued Joseph with nervous energy, "was telling me about his lordship's place where he goos to look at the stars. He was a-saying, your la'ship, his lardship wanted a man a nights to bide up

long with him and help. So I made bold to ask ee to ask his lardship to give me the job."

"Really? But why did you not apply to the steward or to Lord Sharland himself?"

"I asked Mr. Williams, ma'am, your la'ship, and I'm going to ask his lardship. Mr. Williams says I ain't man enough for the job. Vurry likely his lardship won't hae me neither."

"But why ask me?"

"Your la'ship," he replied, nervously rumpling his hair, "is a ooman."

"Without doubt. What of that?"

"A ooman, please your la'ship, is tenderer hearted than what a man is, and this here is for a ooman's sake."

She looked up into the crimsoning face and glowing eyes, then down upon her little daughter and smiled. "But," she said presently, "what do you know about the stars?"

"I don't know as I knows much about 'em," he replied after some consideration,

"but, if you please, your la'ship, I do wonder a good deal."

"Can you tell me why the days draw in at this time of year?"

"Well, I allow it's along of the sun going south. In a manner of saying, 'tis the yearth tipped up south end again the sun."

"But Lord Sharland needs an educated man—one who understands the rudiments of mathematics and can write clearly and quickly."

"I can write so as folks can read, please your la'ship," he returned eagerly, "and I bain't so slow as some. This yere's my writen," timidly offering a slip of paper.

She looked at it with a gathering smile for some seconds, during which Joseph could hear the beech mast fall and split; then she looked up keenly at the writer's face.

"Not so bad," she commented. "But the arithmetic, the reckoning?"

"I was mis'able forrard with hreckoning at school, your la'ship. And I ben in fractions."

"Really? After an explosion, presumably?"

"No, your la'ship. Ater a day's work. Winter evenings 'long with schoolmaster. Him and me done this here *algebra.* And he've a-learned me gravity and density and that."

"How superfluous!" she thought. "And so you wish to sit up, shivering and turning a telescope all through the frosty winter nights for a woman's sake?" she added. "And I, being a woman, am to try to get the situation for you in virtue of my tender heart, eh? Very well. Good afternoon."

"But, my dear child," Lord Sharland replied when the subject was laid before him that evening, "I want an intelligent man, who can observe and record, as well as fetch and carry and knock in nails. Woodnutt has good work and a share in his father's business. They rent a few fields, keep cows, and do all themselves. And no man can work both night and day."

"Not for a woman's sake?" asked the young countess, smiling up in his face.

"Romance! sentiment! humbug! What I want is an intelligent artisan of some education. The sort of fellow who makes a good sapper."

"Try *my* man," she returned, clasping her hands on his shoulder and laying her cheek against his arm; "my rustic artisan, who thinks astronomy 'mis'able interesting,' who has 'been in fractions' on winter evenings, and is always wondering about the stars."

"What is to be done with a woman who gives five-and-thirty pounds for a shabby old clock that won't go, and wants to spoil one's astronomical observations for the winter, and perhaps ruin the new telescope, for the sake of an ignorant yokel, whose native stupidity is trebled by his being in love?"

"Try him, dearest. As for his being in love, the woman may be his grandmother, for all I know. The clock tells the changes of the moon, and keeps excellent time if

wound up. How kind you are, darling! When do I ask anything in vain?"

On the following Sunday Joseph Woodnutt slept so soundly during afternoon sermon that it took some time and labour to rouse him. When at last these efforts were successful, and he stumbled out into the churchyard, where Annie and her mother had stopped to speak to neighbours, his eyes were glazed and heavy, and his words accompanied by what Mrs. Burt styled "the gapes." She began to consider the natural depravity of the human male, and his inevitable gravitation to public houses and beer jugs. Even steady Joe Woodnutt was male, and consequently malign.

"What ever hev ee ben at, Joe? Where was ee last night?" she asked with a sharpness she knew to be indiscreet.

"I ben helpen folks measuren of stars all night," was the too ready reply, most grievous to Mrs. Burt, who supposed it to be the newest slang for a night of dissipation.

"Young men will be young men," she observed sadly; "must hae their fling. Beware of the devil's dancen hours, and spenden good money in bad company, Joe Woodnutt, avore it's too late."

"His lardship is not, so to say, vurry bad company, though he do bide up a-nights, Mrs. Burt," was the grave reply. "This yere star measuren is miserable pleasant, I allow, and brings in good money."

They walked on silently, and the young couple having wished Mrs. Burt good-bye at the turn to her cottage, she trudged up the bank alone.

The afternoon had turned cloudy and chill, and gusts of wind shrieked through the waning woods with menace of rain. The sadness of life fell sadly upon the widow's heart as she entered her lonely cottage. The hearth was cold; 'Liza absent on business; the kitten leaped to her with a feeble mew; straight before her, striking the eye with an ever new shock, was the place whence the clock, with an almost human gaze, had

looked and ticked its quiet welcome. How heavy the silence was! how harsh the angry wind-howl in the trees!

She sat idle and dejected by the unkindled hearth, her face turned from the place where the clock's outline was marked on the vacant wall, missing the sound that was the household voice, calling the hours of rest and duty, marking events and bringing facts and faces to mind. Without the clock all stagnated, even time itself; something that echoed the slow ticktacks in her bosom had stopped too.

When night fell she roused herself to light her fire, cheered a moment by its ruddy warmth. But the kettle's song, 'Liza's croon, the scent of tea, all failed to soothe to-night. Whenever the solitary woman turned to her table the firelight showed the blank on the wall, recalling Jim's delinquency, family pride abased, Annie's savings gone and prospects marred, and the bitter struggle to get the money. A few days since she had been overproud of Jim; now she had

scarce heart to be glad of his averted disgrace. The savour of life was gone. She was accustomed to go out to work where extra hands were needed; she took home sewing, and made and sold mead, ketchup, and such things, thus taking the edge from solitude, and making the quiet of her hearth and the companionship of the cat and the clock doubly welcome.

But now, when the long, dark evenings drew on, the loss of the slow, comforting ticktack became more noticeable; with winter storms filling the woods with eldritch shrieks and weird wailings, and rain drawing a chill curtain over all, the sequestered cottage became more solitary than solitude itself; the heavens were blotted out, a vast stretch of impenetrable night spread between her and humanity. Then in the wild autumn nights she shuddered and drooped by her lonely hearth, spiritless and haunted by sad thoughts and strange fears. The very slowness of the clock's steady ticktack had been comforting and companionable; from mark-

ing the lapse of time it had become an assurance of eternity. Without haste, without rest, day and night, summer and winter, in fair weather and foul, the voice was always the same, always pregnant with memories of her whole maiden and married life, its labour and rest, joy and sorrow, sickness and health.

So a strangeness grew upon her, and day by day she pined, losing sleep and lightness of cheer and all natural desire of food and pleasure in sunshine, and neighbours' children had scarcely left off running in to ask what of the clock to set their mother's timepieces by when Mrs. Burt gave up, dazed and seeming to care for nothing, yet complaining of no pain.

Jim, penitent and conscience-struck, drove over with his wife; but the couple could scarcely get a word from her save that she was lonesome and worn out. He brought her a cheap timepiece, with a quick, loud tick, that fretted her nerves and never told correct time.

Toward the new year Annie found her

mother helpless and in bed; the doctor was fetched, and neighbours, coming in to help, told one another that Ellen Burt would scarcely see the snowdrops.

So Joseph Woodnutt thought on New Year's Eve when he looked in at dusk to inquire for her, and found Annie crying alone.

When he came out of the cottage he strode straight across the road, in the roaring wind, under the leafless trees, to Nutcombe Place, and boldly demanded audience with her ladyship, to the indignation of the man who answered his ring at the principal entrance. Firelight blazed through the hall windows upon the grass, and upon armour, and boar spears, and full-length portraits within. Clear treble laughter rang out: he could see the young mother and children playing at ball under the hollies and mistletoes in the glow.

"Who is this who *must* see her ladyship," the tall young countess asked, stepping toward the door. "What, Woodnutt? What

is her ladyship to do now, pray? A woman's sake again?"

He stepped into the full blaze, and stood unabashed before the stately lady, now seated in a carved oaken chair, her children grouped about her. "Yes, your la'ship," he replied, "for a ooman's sake agen. And the ooman's dying now. If you please," he continued, when her words had assured him of her sympathy, "you bought Mrs. Burt's clock. I want to buy en back again. That's all."

"Oh!" The sympathy left her face; her voice became cold and sharp. "I do not understand. I have no clocks to sell," she replied.

"Begging your pardon," he returned, "your la'ship have got a clock ben in Mrs. Burt's family over a hundred year. Mrs. Burt's a-dying for want of that clock, and I must have en. I can give ee twenty pound down, and the other fifteen in a fortnight."

"Lord Sharland has spoken well of you, Woodnutt. You presume upon his good

opinion. Mrs. Burt certainly sold me a clock some time since for a high price. She was eager to sell it. It is a good clock. I have no intention of parting with it."

She rose in cold displeasure and turned her back upon him. "Come, Gwenny," she said, reaching a hand to her daughter and moving away.

"But she'll die!" cried Joseph, following her. "Mrs. Burt'll die, your la'ship!"

She turned back and paused, half perplexed, wholly indignant, yet softening. "Poor woman! I am sorry. What can I do for her?"

"Sell me that there clock. If she could hear en ticktacken again same as all her life she med perk up again. She can't bide without en. She's entirely pined away for en."

"Absurd! Pining away for a thing of wood and metal! Why, then, did she sell her clock? I am sorry for the poor woman, but I really can not give people clocks because somebody happens to be dying."

"Do ee bide and hearken, ma'am, your

la'ship," he implored, barring her way and turning the blaze of his earnest eyes upon her, so that she stepped back a few paces and leaned against the tall chimney-piece. "Mrs. Burt's Annie's mother."

"Ah!" There was awakening interest in the word. "Who is Annie, pray? And what has Annie to do with the stars?"

"Annie Burt gave me her promise, your la'ship," he replied with gravity. "Then came family trouble; I swore on the Bible not to tell. Annie and her mother they raised money wanted between 'em. But my girl is too proud to come to me empty-handed, and she seen her mother pined for the clock, and she said she'd work her fingers to the bone but she'd buy en back. So I thinks to myself, I'll work that clock back myself, and I'll work Annie's savings back. So I up and I go to you, a young ooman with a husband and children and a tender heart——"

"And said it was for a woman's sake," she interrupted with a little laugh, and eyes

suffused with sympathy. "I was not aware that I was plotting against my poor clock that day—everybody seems to want my darling clock. Well, well! The clock is yours, Woodnutt. And my best wishes are yours. I must see your Annie; she shall have a wedding present. I must give her the wedding gown. She is to be congratulated. She will have a manly, true-hearted husband."

By this time Joseph was one solid blush; his head went round, his mouth opened, and he found himself standing alone, listening bewildered to the departing steps of mother and children.

Bells pealed merrily upon the roaring wind from the church tower as he hastened back to the cottage, eager to tell Annie that the clock was redeemed and everybody was to be happy ever after.

They were striving to convey these tidings to the dulled ear of Mrs. Burt an hour later when the sound of voices and footsteps below called attention to men wheeling a truck, upon which something lay on a mat-

tress covered with a cloth, up the garden path.

"Mother," said Joseph joyously, "wold clock's come back. He's comen up gairden. Take and drink this here soup. Money? Money's all right. He's buyed back."

Later still Mrs. Burt sat up in bed, only half believing the news, when the familiar warning whirr was heard in the quiet through the open door, and eight slow strokes rang out.

Tears rushed to her eyes, her heart beat more strongly, her hearing quickened at the comfortable voice of her lifelong friend; every ticktack that followed seemed to bring her desolate spirit back from some far and friendless waste to the peace and security of home, and made her forget all the pain and humiliation and heartbreak she had lately gone through.

"A happy New Year to ee!" cried Joseph, vanishing downstairs at this juncture, to find 'Liza, round-eyed with astonishment, sniffing and staring at the clock, which looked as

if it had never withdrawn its jovial gaze from the hearth.

"The employer's convenience," Lord Sharland complained that evening, "is well known to be a negligible quantity. Still, it's hard to lose a good helper just as one has broken him in."

"For a woman's sake?" asked the bright-eyed young wife. "Not hard at all. But don't be afraid. My man finds the stars so 'mis'able interesting' that he won't give them up because he is married and happy. I shall return Annie's savings myself with some gracefully innocent fib. I think, dearest, you must give him permanent employment; also a cottage with a bit of ground to it."

"No doubt I must if I value my domestic peace. But I draw the line at two acres and a cow."

THE END

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